LETTERS

ON

THE FINE ARTS,

WRITTEN FROM PARIS.

IN THE YEAR

1815.

By HENRY MILTON, Esq.

Quid deinde loquere? Quirites,
Hoc, puto, non justum est; illud male; rectius illud.
Scis etenim justum gemina suspendere lance
Ancipitis libræ; rectum discernis, ubi inter
Curva subit, vel cum fallit pede regula varo.

PERS.

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1816.

PREFACE.

Amongst the events recorded in the history of the Arts, few will be found more extraordinary, or more important, than the formation and the destruction of the Museum of the Louvre.

Bands of practised ruffians, their own land no longer furnishing them with the employment in which they delighted, were sent into other countries to continue their crimes under a less ignominious name.

That the progress of Armies thus composed, should be marked by robbery and devastation was to be expected; but the usual and more general objects of plunder were not sufficient to satisfy the rapacity of the French. Troops of scientific rob-

bers followed their armies; and either by forced treaties, or open violence, obtained possession of whatever they deemed excellent and valuable.

The ability which conducted these enterprises was equal to their atrocity: all the Continent yielded to the genius and the fortune of the aspiring ruler of France: and the system of learned and scientific plundering, basely commenced and unblushingly pursued, kept pace with his victories, and was not abandoned until there were assembled in the Libraries and Museums of Paris, all the most interesting monuments of literature and the arts.

Nearly twenty years of undisturbed possession appeared to have secured these treasures to France: but the power by which they were obtained has ceased to exist; a better order of things has succeeded; and the ill-acquired pictures, sta-

tues, and manuscripts, are at length restored to their owners.

In the following pages the author has endeavoured to give a more complete account of the magnificent and astonishing collection of the Louvre, than has yet been offered to the public. The interest which such an account must excite is, he conceives, greater now that the collection is destroyed, than when it remained entire, and accessible.

The chief part of these Letters are devoted to remarks on the principal statues and pictures. In submitting them to the Public, some explanation of the writer's intention should perhaps be given.

Works of art may be viewed either with reference to the *means* by which they are produced, or to the effect resulting from those means. It is the exclusive privilege of the artist to speak on the former

subject; but on the latter, those who do not possess practical skill may be competent to judge. The labours of the sculptor, the painter, and the architect, would fail of success if they were only addressed to the artist. They are given to the world; and hence all will assume to themselves a right to judge and discuss their merits: nor can any production be considered as successful, which gains only the applause of those who view it with reference to the difficulty of its execution, and the accuracy of its parts.

The argument has indeed been carried still further; and it has been employed to shew, that practical skill is detrimental to general criticism; that the artist loses sight of the end in the means; and that his own peculiar style, the turn of his own study, influences his opinion, or at least occupies too great a portion of his attention. But

splendid instances might be adduced, in the literature of our own country, disproving these assertions.—In the criticisms contained in this volume, the author has endeavoured not to encroach on the province of the artist.

To the remarks on painting, sculpture, and architecture, are subjoined some observations on the dramatic exhibitions of the French.

London, May, 1816.

Printed by W. Clowes,
Northumberland-court, Strand.



LETTERS,

&c. &c.

LETTER I.

SCULPTURE.—*The Halls of the Antique.—The Venus de Medicis.*

DEAR SIR,

SCARCELY am I arrived in Paris,—scarcely has my eye glanced rapidly over the treasures of the Louvre, before assuming the importance of an authorized and practised critic, I sit down to pronounce judgment on the masterpieces of art.

But you have sanctioned my writing to you on these subjects; and therefore, without pre-

tending to feel the necessity for any apology, which in such cases, if it means any thing, is only a polite confession of a determination to offend, I shall avail myself of your permission, and from time to time submit to you such observations as may arise from the objects around me.

The English lover of painting and sculpture has long been tantalized by knowing how near to him were placed all the most admirable works of art, yet so placed as to render all access to them impossible; and I believe that in the speculations of many people, the ideas of peace and the Louvre were somewhat ridiculously blended. For my own part, I much doubt whether I should have taken the trouble to visit France had it not been for this collection: certain it is, that the interest I felt at approaching Paris would have been much less vivid. Even the pleasure of hearing in every direction English drums and bugles sounding triumphant on the boulevards of the capital of the *Great Nation*, was secondary to the delight

of accomplishing the most ardent wish of many years;—a delight not unmixed with anxiety, lest overwrought expectation should lead to disappointment..

We entered Paris yesterday; and you will easily believe that very soon after our arrival we found ourselves at the door of the Louvre.

I ought perhaps to be ashamed of the trembling veneration with which I entered, but it was not a moment for a zealous lover of the arts to be exactly in his senses; nor will I believe that any person who approaches the Louvre without emotion can fully enjoy the treasures it contains.

The first impression, on entering the Halls of Sculpture, is astonishment that so many works of antiquity should have escaped destruction amidst the perpetual tumult of events which have passed around them; and, after the lapse of so many ages, should thus be brought together in one rich assemblage.—Whilst this sensation lasts it is impossible to think of the crimes and rapine which procured

them, or to refrain from regretting that they should ever again be separated. May we not wish that England with clear and perfect honour could buy the whole? The potentates, who now lay claim to them, have if I mistake not a warmer attachment to English gold than to sculpture. Nor would the purchase only benefit the arts. Politically the money would be well applied: the grandeur and dignity of the nation would be increased by the possession of these matchless statues. But as in reality they are national property, and do not belong to the individual rulers, I fear we could not obtain them without risking what is infinitely beyond even their worth, our public integrity and good faith. We may at least assert, that Europe could not offer them a more secure, a nobler resting-place.—The land of Shakespeare should be the abode of the Apollo.

As the eye glances round the rooms, the injuries, which almost all the statues have sustained, are not perceived; and we are surprised at the apparently perfect state of their preserva-

tion. With very few exceptions all the figures are in attitudes of repose; and this I think it is, which gives a solemn tranquillity to the rooms which not even the bustling crowd of spectators can destroy.

The halls containing the statues are placed irregularly; and I hastened on from one to another in search of the Apollo: but my progress, frequently checked by some *unpassable* figure, was at last stopped by the Venus. In the middle of a large room, round the walls of which are ranged statues and busts, stand five pre-eminent figures, of which this statue is one. I walked round it leisurely several times; and at length seating myself before it, acknowledged that all my expectations were realized, and that it deserved its fame. I pursued my search for the Apollo; but just as I caught a glimpse of it at a distance, my attention was arrested by another Venus. From its mutilated state I at once knew that this was "the statue which enchants the world;" and with the sensation of a man who has mistaken

my lord's gentleman for my lord, I sat down to examine it. Carried away by the impulse of the moment, I had not, in contemplating the former statue, noticed its uninjured state or the whiteness of the marble, either of which circumstances would have told me that it was not the Medicean.

On the first view of the real statue I pronounced it inferior to the other.—Its broken state, and the ill joining of the different pieces,—the discordant colour of the marble with which parts of the body have been restored, and perhaps my wounded vanity, all tended to my disappointment. Still, however, there was something about it which I was unable not to admire; and as the only way to decide the question of their respective merits, I went back to the other statue. Then the Venus triumphed. I could hardly believe that I saw the same figure which had ten minutes before so enchanted me. This, the Venus of the Capitol, and considered the finest of all the hundred antique copies which Rome possessed, is

a statue of prodigious beauty and grace; but when compared with the other, appears heavy, clumsy, motionless, and marbly. The Venus lives. We wonder she does not step off her pedestal, for we are unable to doubt her power of doing so.

In fine pictures, Titian's especially, the flesh often appears as if it would yield to the touch; but till I saw this statue I did not conceive it possible for a similar effect to be produced by marble: it is produced here in a marvellous degree, and constitutes one of the principal charms of the statue. I had intended to devote most of my attention to the Apollo, but the Venus held me in spite of myself.

The French cannot have stripped Rome of all her treasures, as several of the most celebrated pieces of sculpture are not in the collection. I found my familiarity with the casts and engravings from the antique added greatly to the pleasure I received in viewing the originals: it rendered them in a manner old acquaint-

ances;—friends long known, though seen for the first time.

You will probably ask, whether this collection is equal to the idea which I had formed of it? —I answer, yes.—High as were my expectations they have been more than realized. We know that things even of sterling merit, when they are first seen, generally disappoint those who have heard them greatly extolled; but in these sublime marbles, there is an approach to perfection which baffles praise, and is not to be imagined by those who have not beheld them.

Such at least is the impression which, upon a first view, they have produced on myself; nor do I conceive it probable that more attentive, minute, and calm examination will induce me to change it.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

SCULPTURE.—*General Description of the Collection of Statues.*

THE trivial sights of this gaudy city have, almost in spite of myself, occupied part of my time.—It is difficult to escape the contagion of running after *shows;* yet I foresee that at a future day, when the contents of the Louvre are scattered over Europe, never again to be seen except by the rich and idle few, I shall recollect my having been thus seduced, with astonishment and regret.

That the collection will be broken up is no longer a matter of doubt. At present very few pictures and scarcely any of the statues have been removed; but the arrangements for the restoration to the different states are concluded; and the troop of connoisseurs enter the doors

every morning in fearful expectation that some of their favourites may have disappeared.

This restitution is unquestionably just and expedient, but England will have cause to regret it. Every man can command the time and means requisite to visit Paris; not one in a thousand can accomplish a journey to Italy.—That Rome is a better *schoolroom* for the artist than Paris I admit; but how many men of genius have in vain sighed to approach it;—

quorum virtutibus obstat
Res angusta domi.

An elegant and accomplished writer,* who visited Italy before it was plundered by the French, speaks in strong terms of the difference in the effect produced by the masterpieces of sculpture, as viewed each in its separate and splendid shrine; and now when they are crowded together in one collection.—This I can easily conceive; but is *effect* of so much consequence? The Apollo, standing in dig-

* The Rev. J. C. Eustace.—Letter from Paris, 1814.

nified solitude, may perhaps appear, the first time it is viewed, more awful than when surrounded by other figures. This effect cannot, I think, be permanent; the real awfulness of the figure is in itself; and very soon we look at it without any attention to the place where it stands, or to the objects which surround it.

It may even be argued, that on the contrary an advantageous effect is produced by the presence *of other statues; and that the merit of the most* excellent is brought out by comparison with the excellent. We contemplate the glorious statue of the Belvidere Antinous, and declare it to be perfection: we turn to the Apollo, feel its infinite superiority, and have no resource but to pronounce it, divine! But this effect also is in my opinion transitory, the merit of the statue is intrinsic;—it is positive, and not by comparison with any other.

As far as the student is concerned, great, though perhaps not unmixed advantages are offered by the chief objects of study and imitation being thus assembled together. A

year spent in such a collection will render him much better acquainted with the principal statues, than he would be if they were divided amongst many cities, and each separately employed a short portion of his time, and was afterwards no more within his reach. Now, he may resume his examination day after day: he can amend the dangerous errors of first impressions; and he is enabled by direct comparison to assign to each production its just rank in the scale of excellence.—The various styles of sculpture, their defects, their merits,—the gradual progress and decline of the art, are in their fullest extent exhibited at once to his view.

The veneration which I know you feel for this assemblage of the noblest works of art, will make you consider a detailed description of their present abode not uninteresting.

The twelve rooms containing the statues are thus arranged.—The grand entrance is from the north into a vestibule of an octagon shape, of which the alternate sides are formed

by open arches. The one on the right hand leads to a very fine staircase, by which we ascend to the collection of paintings. Opposite to the door of entrance, in a straight line, and in the following order, are five of the halls;—*La salle des Empereurs,—des Saisons,—des Hommes Illustres,—des Romains,—du Laocoon.* They are divided from each other merely by pillars. From the right of the furthest of these halls,—that of the Laocoon,—branches off the *salle de l'Apollon.* Returning to the vestibule, on the left of the entrance is the *salle de Diane,* leading to that of the *Silenus.* In a straight line with the latter are the halls of the *Gladiator* and of the *Muses.* This suite terminates in a semi-circular room, at present only used as a workshop for the men employed in this part of the Museum. Near the entrance of the *salle de Silène,* a door on the left leads into the *salle des Fleuves.*

The grand entrance by the vestibule is seldom open. In general the public are admitted through a mean-looking door situated in a

corner of the mass of buildings which connects the new Louvre with the old. From this door, a narrow passage leads into a small paved court, in the middle of which are placed orange-trees and flowers. The agreeable perfume of these, and the coolness and stillness of the place, are a delightful contrast to the dusty, burning, and noisy scene without: and we at once find ourselves in the region of the arts.—Antique pillars, broken statues and busts, and fragments of inscribed marble, are scattered round the walls.

A short passage on the left conducts directly from this court to the *salle des Hommes Illustres*; and from the same passage, a staircase on the right hand leads to the collection of pictures.

The halls of the *Apollo*, of the *Gladiator*, and of the *Muses*, are of ample dimensions; *La salle des Fleuves* is an extremely spacious and well-proportioned room; the remainder are of moderate size.

With very few exceptions the statues and

busts* are placed close to the walls; consequently they can only be viewed in front. This is the most important objection to the manner in which the collection is arranged; in other respects the distribution has been made with judgment and taste.

The Apollo stands in a niche at the upper end of the room which bears its name. It is supported on its base by a bar of iron placed in the wall, and fastened between the shoulders of the statue. This is rendered more firm by a second bar connected with it, and fixed in the pedestal. The fractures in both the legs of the statue have rendered these supports necessary; but they do not in the slightest degree injure the effect of the figure. The floor on which the

* The following were the numbers of the pieces of antique sculpture mentioned in the catalogues of the museum: 184 statues—140 busts—43 bas-reliefs—34 altars sarcophagi, vases, &c. In addition to these there were a few statues, busts, and bas-reliefs, which had not any numbers affixed to them.

pedestal stands is somewhat elevated; it is surrounded by ornamented rails; and two antique sphinxes in red oriental granite are placed, one on each side. There is just space enough between the pedestal and the wall to permit a person to walk round.

In the same room with the Apollo, and on the left of the entrance, is the Antinous of the Belvidere.

The group of the Laocoon stands in the place of dignity at the extremity of the suite of rooms which fronts the vestibule. It is placed against the wall, and is enclosed with iron rails.

Near the Laocoon, to the left, stands the Venus de Medicis, in front of a square recess about eight feet in width. She is protected by a circular rail. Seats are placed in the recess; and in it is a window which the statue faces. The situation shews the figure to great advantage, but its high fame demanded a station of greater dignity.

In the *salle des Romains*, is the dying Gladiator: opposite to it the Torso, encircled with rails.

The Gladiator of the Borghese stands in the centre of its hall: near it is the group of the Meleager.

The Hermaphrodite of the Borghese is placed in a recess, on the left hand, near the entrance of the *salle des Fleuves*.

With great deference to the judgment of Mr. Eustace, I am inclined to dissent from the opinion which he has given with regard to the proper mode in which statues should be exhibited.—That gentleman complains, that the halls of the Antique in the Louvre "*are not embellished in such a style of magnificence as becomes the combination of wonders which they contain.*" * This I cannot acquiesce in.—The rooms, I admit, are not appropriate to their contents, but the fault is, that they are too much ornamented, too splendid in their de-

* Letter from Paris, page 41.

corations.—Painted ceilings, gilded figures in relievo, and all the tawdry richness of a state drawing-room, are discordant with the severity and dignified simplicity of sculpture.

The walls of several of the rooms are lined entirely with marble of a dark colour. This is not only magnificent, but forms an excellent contrast to the white figures which stand against them. Many of the halls are paved with marble. They are lofty, and well lighted; and it is chiefly in the profusion of architectural decoration, and the frivolous paintings and gilding which disfigure the ceilings, that they appear to me liable to censure.*

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* The pedestals, on which most of the first-rate statues were placed in Italy, were of splendid materials, and ornamented with works in relievo. The bad taste of this cannot be doubted. A statue should be placed on a square pedestal of plain, unpolished stone, harmonizing in its proportions with the figure it sustains, but perfectly unornamented, having nothing about it to retain the eye. In some of the halls of the antique in the Louvre the pedestals were of this description: in others they were of coloured marble: and in

But with all its merits, and all its imperfections, the collection is doomed no longer to exist.—They who have seen it are fortunate.

You will ask, what are become of the pictures? and has my veneration for sculpture totally destroyed all my regard for the sister art?—This is not the case; but exquisite paintings are no new sight:—the glories of sculpture are.

We enter the Halls of the Antique, and are almost oppressed by the sensation, that we stand surrounded by treasures which the world cannot equal,—that there is but one Belvidere Apollo, one Medicean Venus, one Laocoon,—and they are before us. On entering the gallery of pictures we breathe more freely. The collection is noble, is magnificent; yet an Englishman need not be envious. He feels

some few instances the French love of finery was visible.—The pedestal of the Apollo, for example, was an ornamented octagon: that of the Venus was circular, and formed of different kinds of highly-polished marble.

with pride that here his country may contend, nay, may claim the superiority.—I speak not figuratively in saying, that if we deem the chief worth and the perfection of painting to consist, not in the mere imitation of nature, but in the power of imbodying sublime and noble ideas, we cannot hesitate to assert, that all the pictures in this collection are not equal in value to the awful gallery at Hampton Court.

The Louvre is filled with masterpieces by nearly all the famous painters; yet none of them, except the Transfiguration, approach to the elevation of genius which reigns in the Cartoons.

In my next letters I shall confine myself solely to the pictures.

LETTER III.

PAINTING.—*General Description of the Collection of Pictures.*

As in my last letter I gave you a description of that part of the Museum in which the statues are placed, so in this I shall explain the general arrangement of the collection of paintings.

The noble staircase from the vestibule of the Halls of the Antique terminates in an open saloon supported by marble pillars and leading to the door of the first room; which is filled with the works of the earliest masters. Passing through it we enter a very large, noble, and lofty apartment, which is styled the grand saloon. It is lighted from above, and contains

many pictures anterior to the time of Raphael: the rest are miscellaneous, and are I believe such as from their size or from having been recently obtained, could not be placed with those of the schools to which they belong.—Many are by Spanish masters.

At the corner of the saloon, diagonally opposite to the entrance, is the door of the far-famed gallery of the Louvre. The descriptions which have so frequently been given of the astonishing splendor of this room, are I think greatly exaggerated: at least my expectations were completely disappointed.—A gallery of so great a length cannot of course be graceful in its proportions; but this room is too narrow for a vaulted apartment, and would be so, were it but eighty feet in extent.*—

* The length of the gallery of the Louvre is 448 *metres*, 1471 English feet; this breadth is only 10 *mètres*, about 33 English feet. Towards the middle it is considerably wider than in the other parts; but this wider division forms a very inconsiderable proportion of the entire length.

Long and narrow as it is, and the arch of the roof being nearly a semicircle, it looks, if you will pardon the comparison, like a great interminable pipe: and the numerous large pictures sloping forward from the walls add to the bad effect; as they give, when seen in perspective, a still more contracted appearance to the ceiling. At intervals, are handsome marble pillars advanced some feet from the wall: these in a slight degree break the length of the gallery, but not sufficiently to render it graceful to the eye. After the first fifty or sixty yards, these pillars, and the sloping edges of the picture-frames, are all that the spectator sees: and I am totally at a loss to understand on what principle of beauty the general *coup d'œil* of this room can be admired.

The walls at the upper end are covered with silk of a light brown colour: the remainder is stucco painted of the same tint. Throughout the whole extent of the gallery, the sides to the height of about four feet are lined with white marble. The ceiling is richly gilded,

but its ornaments are heavy and in bad taste. To protect the pictures a rail is placed at the distance of a yard from the wall, and a few domestics in the livery of the court are stationed in the different rooms: but in this, as in every public establishment in France, there appears the most perfect reliance on the good conduct of those who frequent it; nor have I ever seen the slightest abuse of this liberal confidence.

A great many of the pictures are in very bad lights.—Such as are placed high, and the upper part of those, of a larger size, can scarcely be seen. This is only the case with the lower and middle divisions of the gallery. Towards the upper end of the room, where the finest Italian pictures are placed, windows in the roof have been introduced, and the light is excellent.

The schools are disposed very properly.—The French occupies the lowest place, the Italian the highest: but the distribution is not perfect.—The works of the Italian artists of the different schools are very much blended

together, as are those of the Flemish, Dutch, and German painters; and in a great many instances pictures have strayed to a great distance from the other productions of the same master. But the arrangement originally intended is still clearly marked, and is as follows:—The French school,—the Dutch,—the German,—the Flemish,—the Bolognese,—the Venetian, and the Florentine and Roman.

This collection is I believe by far the most numerous that ever existed;* yet there are many first-rate artists in whose works it is by no means rich. The merits of Salvator Rosa, Claude Lorraine, Gaspar Poussin, Rembrandt, and Teniers, and of Vandyck, particularly as a portrait-painter, must not be estimated by

* The number of pictures mentioned in the catalogues were 1321. Of these 112 were of the French school; including 26 by Nicolo Poussin, and 6 by Claude Lorraine, both of whom the French very improperly rank amongst their own artists: 638 were Flemish, German, and Dutch. The remainder, 561, were Italian, except a very few pictures by Spanish masters, which were classed with them.

their productions in the Louvre.—Carlo Dolci, Giuseppe Cesari, Velasquez, Bloemart, and Both, contribute but one picture each.—By Borgognone, Hobbima, and the Hemskirks, there are none. But in the works of most of the other masters, particularly of the more celebrated Italians, and of Rubens, the gallery is rich indeed.*

In all the collections of fine pictures, the subjects of a great part of them are taken from sa-

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* The following list will give some idea of the extent and richness of the collection.

There were 20 pictures by Albano,—10 by Bassan,—42 by the Caracci,—9 by Correggio,—17 by Domenichino,—17 by Guercino,—5 by Giorgione,—25 by Guido,—3 by Mantegna,—5 by Parmigiano,—4 by Sebastian del Piombo,—26 by Nicolo Poussin,—26 by Raphael,—10 by Julio Romano,—7 by Andrea del Sarto,—24 by Titian,—18 by Paul Veronese, and 7 by Leonardo da Vinci.

There were 4 pictures by Albert Durer,—17 by Gerhard Douw,—17 by Holbein,—14 by Adrian Ostade,—10 by Paul Potter,—33 by Rembrandt,—57 by Rubens,—17 by Teniers the younger,—34 by Vandyck,—6 by John Van Eyck, and 33 by Philip Wouwermans.

cred history; but in the Louvre the proportion is much larger than usual. Buonaparte plundered the mansions of individuals with little repugnance, but churches and monasteries with still less. Of the fifty-seven pictures by Rubens no less than thirty-seven are scriptural, and amongst them are many of his finest and most celebrated works.

You will ask me, what pictures by English masters are admitted to a place in this assemblage?—*Not one.*—The walls dignified by the productions of Jouvenet, Mignard, Le Nain, and Bourdon, would be profaned by the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Hogarth, Gainsborough, or Wilson.—This exclusion, be it founded on hostility, envy, or bad taste, is alike contemptible.

From half past two o'clock till four the gallery is crowded. It is the general rendezvous of the English, and appears to supply extremely well the absence of Bond-street. The ladies sit on the benches, which are placed opposite the chief pictures, and look sideways at

the gentlemen: the gentlemen walk up and down in long uncivil rows, and look full at the ladies:—and of the immense crowds of visitors from England who throng the Louvre, and doubtless would all assert that they came for the express purpose of studying its contents, it is laughable to observe how very few are really attentive to the treasures which surround them.

With the effect of the gallery as a splendid and magnificent spectacle I have declared that I am disappointed: but the walk from its entrance to the other extremity produces a most pleasing and interesting sensation; and which far from decreasing by repetition is strengthened every day as we become more familiar with its contents.—The whole extent of this noble art is displayed before us.—The power of imitation in the Dutch school, the force and boldness of the Flemish, the grace of the Bolognese, and the realizing splendour of the Venetian, form, as the observer rapidly passes on, a progressive ascent to the sublimity and perfection of Raphael.—Examined attentively, the

links of this chain will be found unequal and disjointed; but the whole together cannot I think fail of producing on the mind, the effect of a gradual expansion from the lower and more material provinces of the art, to those in which it becomes the vehicle of intellectual energy.

When next I address you I shall venture to criticise some of the paintings in this noble collection.

LETTER IV.

Painting. — *Pictures in the first Room.— Cimabue.—Giotto.—Holbein.—Pictures in the Grand Saloon. — Albert Durer. — Rubens. — Vasari. — Sacchi di Pavia. — Murillo. — Le Brun.—Michel Angelo Buonarroti.*

In my last letter I described the general arrangement of the pictures: I will now particularize such as have appeared to me most worthy of notice, in the two first rooms.

The collection of paintings by the earlier masters, although by no means complete, exhibits, in a very interesting manner, the gradual advancement of the art.

First in time and first in interest, is a picture by Cimabue, the father of modern paint-

ing. It is of a large size, painted in distemper, on wood. The Virgin is seated on a throne, and supports in her lap the Infant Saviour. At each side are three angels ranged on steps in perfect regularity. Of these attendants, one half are adorned with red glories, the other half with blue, counterchanged most heraldically. The figures are not inelegant in their attitudes, but are ill drawn, particularly the extremities; and the features are so large, and hard, as to be grotesque. There is an attempt at something like perspective, but it is lamentably unsuccessful. The carnations are turned quite blue; in other respects the picture is well preserved, and the gilding of the back ground and of the border, which is ornamented with medallions representing the Apostles and Saints, is astonishingly fresh. Gilding in those days was done with a lavishness of expense which defied time. This part of the picture has certainly not been restored, but the bright colouring of the dra-

pery of some of the figures, looks very suspicious.

This description will not give you a very favourable opinion of Cimabue; yet there is in the picture something which approaches to an air of grandeur, both in the composition and colouring. The artist thought well, but could not work out his idea.—It is the commencement of the reviving splendor of Italy.

Near this picture of Cimabue's, is placed an excellent painting by his disciple Giotto. *Les stigmates de Saint François.* This work proves the rapid strides with which the art advanced.* A thorough Catholic is doubtless bound to regard the subject of the picture with reverence. The legend tells us, that Saint Francis, two years before his death, retired for the purposes of contemplation, to the solitude of the Apennines. One pleasant morning the

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* Cimabue was born in the year 1240 and died in 1300. Giotto was born in 1276 and died in 1336.

saint, whilst occupied in his devotions, was visited by a seraph adorned with six wings of flame; between which there appeared a cross, and, nailed to the cross, the figure of a man. The saint was marvellously surprised; but his astonishment increased, when, as the vision gradually disappeared, he discovered on his hands and feet marks as of nails, and on his left side a wound flowing with blood. The absurdity of this story has piously been enforced by Giotto. Three rays of light shoot from each extremity of the cross: the four centre rays are successful, and strike the hands and feet of the saint; but the other eight are quite thrown away. The accommodating attitude in which Saint Francis places himself to receive these honourable marks is inimitably ludicrous. The cross-firing necessary for a wound on the left side, was above the scope of Giotto's invention, and is therefore omitted.

There are pictures by Taddeo Gaddi, Memmi, and Giovanni Angelico, rival of the famous

Masaccio: but of the works of Masaccio himself the museum possesses no specimen.

Here are also two pictures by Hubert Van Eyck; and rather out of its place as to time, a noble work by Holbein. It consists of three pictures in one frame, all excellent. That which is placed the highest exhibits the *Stigmates* of Saint Francis, but the story is told with much more discretion than by Giotto. The picture in the centre represents our Saviour taken down from the cross, and the subject of the lowest is the Last Supper. In this, which is by far the finest of the three, the heads, except that of our Saviour, are admirably, nay grandly, painted; but the historic dignity of the faces of the apostles is sadly disturbed by the coarse-featured portrait of the artist, in the character of a servant. The ill effect of introducing portraits into historical compositions, particularly where the subject is sacred, cannot be denied. In German and Flemish paintings bad taste need not excite our surprise, but we find the same practice in the severest masters

of the Italian schools. Vanity, and the wish to flatter, are more powerful than good taste.

The second room contains many extremely fine pictures.—*The adoration of the Kings*, by Albert Durer. The figure of the Moor on one of the *volets* is admirable for force and expression. The finishing and style of colouring of the entire picture are excellent.

Hunting the Wolf, by Rubens—An astonishingly fine picture: the best of the class I ever saw, and as brilliant as if painted yesterday.

The Annunciation, by Vasari—The colouring of this picture is weak and tawdry; but the composition has great merit. Nothing can exceed the propriety of expression in the two figures. Each is filled with respect for the other, but the different nature of this respect, is conceived with great delicacy of discrimination. The Virgin appears conscious of her high destiny, yet abashed by the presence of her heavenly visitor. The submission, with which the angel approaches the mother of the Messiah, is blended with the benevolence of a

superior being. The style of painting is what I expected from Vasari, but I had no idea that he *thought* so well.

The Doctors of the Church, by Pietro Francesco Sacchi di Pavia—This picture, for depth, splendor, and force of colouring, is perhaps not exceeded by any in the Louvre. There is a hardness of manner, and much of the bad taste of the age;—each of the personages has his symbol, and the head of an unlucky bull is terribly prominent; but the life and expression of character in the faces are quite wonderful. It is a picture on which the eye dwells with pleasure.

But there is one production in this room which eclipses all the rest; and yields in powerful effect to very few in the collection. It is the first, in the order of the events represented, of two pictures by Murillo. On the night of the fifth of August,—but in what year the history does not mention,—the Virgin with the Infant Jesus appeared to a certain Roman nobleman and his spouse during their

sleep, declaring her acceptance of their fortune,—for, it seems, that being childless, they had made a will in her favour,—and directing them to build a church to her honour on a spot which, when they awoke, would be pointed out to them, by its being covered with snow. In the morning, when they came to compare notes with the pope, they found that his holiness had dreamed to the same effect. Whereupon the pope and clergy and laity, all set out on the sixth of August to look for snow. They found it of course; and the church of Santa Maria Maggióre was built. The first picture represents the descent of the Virgin;—the second, the interview with the pope, and in the back ground, by rather a strong licence, the artist has shewn the procession. This picture is exceedingly well painted, in his freest and most pleasing manner, with great breadth and harmony of colouring, but bears no comparison to the former; which I will endeavour to describe,

though with little hope of conveying to you any just idea of its merits.

The shape of the picture, indeed of both the pictures, is the segment of a circle, considerably less than a semicircle: the subject is very skilfully adapted to this form. On the left are the husband and wife sleeping. It did not suit the painter to let them be comfortably in bed, and therefore the man is reclining in a chair; the woman near him on the ground. The appearance of profound sleep is admirably given to both: and the figure of the man is dignified, and painted with great force. Above, rather to the right, and borne on the air, are the Virgin and Child. Further to the right is a door, through which the country is seen illuminated by the moon.—You will ask me, what is there so very pre-eminent in all this? —The pre-eminence is in the remainder of the picture;—*the night*. I should fear that I was carried away by some wild fancy, did I not find many persons who admire this production

equally with myself. Do not smile and tell me, that a large extent of black paint is no miracle.—The effect it produces, is miraculous. The spectator feels almost as if he himself were in the chamber, and in darkness. The Virgin is surrounded by an atmosphere of light, but its effect gradually lessens, and does not extend far from her. The painter has boldly, and I think properly, sacrificed truth to effect in the two sleeping figures: they are not obscured by the darkness, although there is no light which should render them visible; as the Virgin is more in the back ground, nor indeed does the splendor which encircles her radiate so far. Such is the best description which I can give you of this picture: I feel that it will make you acquainted with the improprieties in the composition, rather than explain the singular merits which convert them into beauties. If assertion might be substituted for proof, I would assure you, that I have hardly ever seen a painting more powerful in effect; or one which more strongly seizes and detains the attention.

This painting and its companion are placed one on each side of the picture of *Hunting the Wolf:* all the three are of large dimensions, occupying together nearly the whole length of the room. The animation, the flash and burning day-light of Rubens, form an admirable contrast to the tranquillity and grave tone of Murillo.

There are in this saloon the celebrated battles by Le Brun.—They have nothing to recommend them but the composition: and this artist is I think seen to much greater advantage in the prints engraved from his works than in the originals.

Here is also a picture dignified by the name of Michel Angelo Buonarroti; but its authenticity is denied. It has very little merit, and is not even characteristic of the master. The want of a genuine production from the pencil of this transcendent genius is the great *hiatus* in the collection.*

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* Mr. Duppa, in his Life of Michel Angelo Buonarroti, states that the only easel-picture by this artist, which exists

Having brought you to the door of the Gallery I shall conclude my letter.

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and can be authenticated, is the Holy Family in the Florentine Gallery.

The picture in the Louvre was denominated *The Dream of Michel Angelo, or the Spectacle of Human Life.* It was supposed to be, in reality, a painting by Daniele di Volterra.

LETTER V.

PAINTING.—Raphael.—Perugino.—Julio Romaño.—Leonardo da Vinci.

IT would almost amount to a proof of bad taste not to commence my observations on the gallery by mentioning the productions of Raphael.

We see assembled before us twenty-six of his pictures,* some his earliest, some his

* The following list of the pictures by Raphael is extracted from the catalogue of the Museum:

1.—Portraits de Raphael et de son maître d'armes; ou, selon quelques personnes, portraits de Raphael et du Pontorme, peints par ce dernier.*

2.—Portrait de Balthasar Castiglione.*

3.—Portrait du Cardinal Fedro Inghirami.

4.—Portrait du Pape Jules II.

latest and most celebrated works: they display consequently the immense progress which in a few short years this inimitable

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5.—Portrait du Pape Léon X.

6.—Portrait du Cardinal de Bibbiena.

7.—Portrait d'un jeune homme dont la tête est appuyée sur la main.*

8.—Portrait d'un jeune homme dont le bras est appuyé sur une table, et dont la main pose sur le poignet de l'autre bras.*

9.—Portrait de Jeanne d'Arragon, dont Raphael a peint la tête, et Jules Romain le reste du tableau.*

10.—Le Père éternel apparaît au prophète Ezechiel.*

11.— { La salutation angélique.
L'adoration des rois.
La présentation au temple. }

Ces trois sujets ne sont séparés entr'eux que par des arabesques peints sur le fond.

12.—La Sainte Famille. Raphael fit ce tableau pour le roi François I, en 1518, deux ans avant sa mort.*

13.—La Sainte Famille; connue sous le nom de *la Belle Jardinière.**

14.—La Vierge, l'enfant Jésus et Saint Jean-Baptiste. Tableau connu sous le nom de *la Madonna della Sédia.*

15.—L'enfant Jésus, appuyé sur la Vierge et les pieds

genius made in his art.—His career ended at a period of life when others but begin

posés sur son berceau, caresse Saint Jean que Sainte Elisabeth lui présente.*

16.—Le sommeil de Jésus; la Vierge soulève le voile dont il est couvert, pour le montrer à Saint Jean.*

17.—La Transfiguration.

18.—Jésus dans sa gloire, accompagné de la Vierge et de Saint Jean-Baptiste; au-dessous, Saint Paul et Sainte Catherine. Tableau connu sous le nom des *cinq Saints*.

19.—L'Assomption de la Vierge.

20.—La Vierge couronnée par son fils, dans le ciel.

21.—Saint Michel victorieux du démon.*

22.—Allégorie. Saint Michel combat les monstres.*

23.—Saint George, monté sur un cheval blanc, combat un énorme dragon.*

24.—Saint Cécile, l'apôtre Saint Paul, la Madeleine, Saint Jean l'évangeliste et Saint Augustin, écoutent un concert d'anges.

25.—La Vierge et l'enfant Jésus paraissent dans les airs, environnés d'une cour céleste. Ils sont invoqués par Saint Jérôme, Saint Jean-Baptiste et Saint François d'Assise. Sur le devant, un ange tient une tablette.

26.—Panneau divisé en trois compartimens, représentant la Foi, la Charité, et l'Espérance.

* The thirteen pictures thus marked were in the old royal collection.

to obtain celebrity;* and it is evident that Raphael was never more rapidly improving than just before his death: yet is he not only the first painter the world has ever seen, but his excess of superiority is greater than was ever obtained by any other man in any species of excellence.—He stands separated by a greater interval.—To the truth of this assertion there is one and one only exception.—If Shakespeare be compared with Raphael, where are we to find the dramatic Michel Angelos, Titians, and Correggios?

The Transfiguration, the pride of Italy, and the picture of the first fame in the world, can, alas! scarcely be said to exist as a painting by Raphael. We know that nearly an hundred years ago it had become extremely dark; it is now by far the brightest of all his works in the collection: and not only

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* Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino died in 1520, aged 37 years.

from my own very minute examination, but from the remarks which I have heard from several English artists, I am convinced that it has throughout been newly painted. Anxious to obtain certain information of the fact, I addressed myself the other day to a French artist who was making an *iron* copy of *La Belle Jardinière*. He answered my inquiries politely, but did not appear to feel the slightest interest on the subject.—"*Yes*," he said, "*it had been restored; he did not know by* "*whom;—some of the people employed about* "*the Museum had done it.—Yes, it was* "*very dark before;—he believed that all* "*of it had been painted over, most of* "*it at least; that is, all the parts that re-* "*quired it:*" ending, by very coolly observing, "*that when parts of a picture become* "*imperfect, of course they must be restored.*" —This is indeed profanation. The French might have been forgiven for stealing the picture, or even for making it the subject of chemical experiment; but thus to destroy

it is without excuse. The merest wreck of this noble work, genuine from the hand of Raphael, would have been a thousand times more valuable than such a forgery.

The *people* employed have however done their sacrilegious task better than could have been expected. The expressions of the countenances are admirable, the contours they could scarcely injure; and we may I suppose presume, that in the colouring, they followed the original as closely as possible: but the interest of the picture is gone.

The faults in the composition of this divine production,—for I am decidedly of that faction,—are more striking in the original than in the prints.—Raphael has painted two distinct pictures on the same ground. Each of them separately is faultless. Either of them would have admitted the other as an episode, without any impropriety as to time or action. The impropriety is, that the artist has made the two subjects equally important; neither can be considered as subservient to the other.

If the presentation of the demoniac for cure to the apostles be considered as the chief event, the more noble assemblage of figures in the upper part of the picture is liable to objection, as dividing the attention, and lessening the dignity, of the principal actors; and the superior nature of the personages composing this secondary group, was an additional reason why they should have been less strikingly brought forward. If, as was undoubtedly the case, Raphael considered the transfiguration of our Saviour as the subject of his picture, the numerous and animated group below, occupied by the sufferings of the youth, must be censured as seizing upon the attention, and destroying the effect of the principal figures: and it is certain, that as often as we approach the picture, the eye is first directed to this subordinate crowd.*

* Mr. Fuseli, in his *Lectures on Painting*, defends the composition of this picture against the criticism of Rich-

From the manner in which the two subjects are combined, Raphael has been driven into improprieties, which would never have

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ardson; but his defence goes only to the unity of time in the two actions. This Richardson never denied; indeed, in his *Theory of Painting*, he states expressly, that the unity of time is preserved. In the same passage he also, in a few words, explains the subject of the picture, in the same manner as Mr. Fuseli has done in a long description, which evidently claims the merit of discovering the master's ideas, and which ends with a sneer at the "*purblind criticism of Richardson.*" This is scarcely fair; but the well-earned fame of Richardson, as an animated and profound critic on the arts, cannot so easily be thrown down. There are very few remarks on painting, in the English language, more instructive than those made by him on the Cartoons. In all his writings we find him filled with enthusiasm, but perfectly free from affectation; expressing himself in powerful, but simple language; and not in metaphysical approaches to nonsense, where the intended elevation of the idea is ludicrously contrasted with the bald inaccuracy of the expression. The objection which Richardson does make to the Transfiguration is as follows.

"*There must be one principal action in a picture.*

been pardoned in an artist of less exalted fame. — The eminence from which he represents our Saviour to have ascended, is

" *Whatever under-actions may be going on at the same*
" *instant with that, and which it may be proper to in-*
" *sert, to illustrate or amplify the composition, they*
" *must not divide the picture, and the attention of the*
" *spectator. O divine Rafaelle, forgive me, if I take the*
" *liberty to say, I cannot approve, in this particular, of*
" *that amazing picture of the Transfiguration, where the*
" *incidental action of the man's bringing his son possessed*
" *with the dumb devil to the disciples, and their not being*
" *able to cast him out, is made at least as conspicuous,*
" *and as much a principal action, as that of the trans-*
" *figuration. The unity of time is indeed preserved, and*
" *this under-story would have made a fine episode to the*
" *other (though the other would not properly to this, as*
" *being of more dignity than the principal story in this*
" *case,) but both together mutually hurt one another.*" *

This objection Mr. Fuseli does not attempt to meet; unless what he says, is to be understood as asserting, that the two actions are equally important, and the artist justified in making them equally prominent.

* Richardson's Theory of Painting.—p. 28—29.

limited in height and extent to a few feet, and is placed not many yards distant from the group in the foreground. Yet we are told, that Jesus took Peter and James and John, and led them "*up into an high mountain apart by themselves.*" The mere departure from historical truth is pardonable, but let us observe the consequences which result from it.—The miraculous splendor, which overwhelms with its brightness the three attendant disciples, produces no effect on the group in the fore ground, is not even noticed by them, although represented as close before their eyes.—That the Transfiguration was not made visible to the three disciples only, Raphael himself declares by the two figures in the back ground on the right of the picture, who are seen contemplating the Saviour. Nor can it be urged, that the sufferings of the demoniac would have occupied the attention of the other apostles to the exclusion of every thing else. Their ministry would have rendered such objects familiar to them, whilst

the other event was of surpassing wonder and importance.—The picture, therefore, requires us to believe, that what must have been visible, was not noticed nor even seen: and the ill effect, which results from this unlimited appeal to our credulity, may be illustrated by comparing it to a scene on the stage; where, by the author's mismanagement, some of the personages of the drama are obliged to stand pertinaciously determined not to see or hear an actor who is placed close before their eyes, and who is speaking in no subdued tone of voice.

Faults of a different kind may be charged against the two figures in the back ground which I have just mentioned.—They are portraits,—they are awkwardly introduced,—and they are most improperly represented as enabled to gaze fixedly at that splendor which overpowered the selected companions of our Lord.—It may perhaps be answered, that Raphael introduced these portraits of the nephews of Julius de Medicis in com-

pliment to him, or probably by his command.—This may be an apology for the artist, but it is no defence of the picture.

Thus much in dispraise.—In commendation of the picture let me say, that separately considered both the parts must have been as fine as any thing Raphael ever produced.—It is impossible to conceive a more sublime or a more daring effort of genius than that division of the picture which regards the Transfiguration. The figure and countenance of our Saviour, even as they now exist, have more of elevation and divinity than were ever produced by any other painter.

Many of the figures in the lower division have transcendent merit, particularly the woman in front, whose attitude is unrivalled in elegance and grace;—the young man opposite the boy, and leaning forward to examine his countenance, with a mixed expression of compassion and curiosity;—the man who is seated, and holds a book in his

right hand; and the one immediately above him who is pointing towards the mountain. —The figure of the boy is powerfully horrid; and the father appears listening with an eager and ignorant attention to the disciple, who tells him that Christ alone can restore his child. The story of the demoniac is indeed admirably told; and there perhaps never was a composition in which greater skill was displayed in the arrangement of the figures.

The picture next in excellence to the Transfiguration is I think that in which Saint Cecilia, Saint Paul, Mary Magdalene, Saint John the Evangelist, and Saint Augustin, are listening to the music of angels in the air.—The colouring is peculiarly excellent, the faces beautiful, and the expressions varied with admirable propriety and taste. The figures are graceful and impressive; Saint Paul does not appear with greater dignity even in the Cartoons.

The Vision of Ezekiel. This production

merits its high fame. The personification of the Supreme Being was perhaps never successfully attempted in any other instance. Gray tells us that the description of the *Bard* was taken from this picture; but the image in the poem, although admirable, bears no comparison in sublimity and grandeur to this embodied conception of the Divinity.

The Assumption of the Virgin; a work which he left unfinished, and which was completed after his death by Julio Romano and Il Fattore. The upper part is by Raphael, and is astonishingly beautiful.

La Belle Jardinière.—Nothing can be more elegant and pleasing than the composition of this picture; but there is a weakness in the colouring, which in spite of the expression and grace of the figures, made me view it almost with disappointment, my expectation having been very highly raised by the prints.

The Virgin crowned by her Son. This is

one of his early pictures, yet it has great merit. Some of the faces of the Apostles are painted with wonderful force and expression. —And here let me remark, how much I have been surprised by the pictures in this collection by Perugino. His name is never mentioned but as the master of Raphael: and to his ill instructions are attributed all the early imperfections of his pupil.

That the manner of Raphael when he quitted him was dry, cold, and meagre, is as certain as that it was afterwards the reverse; yet, in examining the pictures of Perugino, I cannot but believe, that some part of Raphael's excellence might originate in his master's precepts. In the elegance of tranquil attitudes, one of the greatest beauties of his pupil, Perugino was highly skilled, though their merit is disguised by his incorrect and stiff drawing; and by his ignorance of grouping. His colouring is grand and impressive, his faces highly finished and beautiful. Looking at their productions

together, it is impossible to deny, that although Raphael might have had much to unlearn, yet that he received some instructions which he did well never to forget.

Of all the paintings in oil by Raphael, the one next in celebrity to the Transfiguration is the *Holy Family*, which he sent to Francis the First, when he excused himself from visiting that monarch. It was one of his latest works; and on such an occasion he doubtless exerted his talents to the utmost: yet it is very far from being one of his most successful efforts. The faces considered separately, are beautiful and expressive, and are painted with great truth and force: but the composition is strangely defective. The figures are crowded disadvantageously one above the other, and the attitudes have little of his accustomed grace. The idea of the Virgin taking the Child out of his cradle is elegantly conceived, but certainly not executed with success. Her attitude is more than inelegant, it is unsightly; and the action of

the Child, though happily and boldly imagined, fails to produce the intended effect. Both the figures are natural, but they are the only two instances in the works of this master, where nature is not combined with grace. The picture was either extremely dark from the first, or is become so by time.

In a former Letter I ventured an opinion that nothing in this gallery equalled the Cartoons at Hampton-court. I have now leisurely examined its contents, and have devoted many hours solely to the study of the paintings by Raphael. My opinion remains unchanged, nay is strengthened, and may, I think, be supported by strong arguments.

The style in which the Cartoons are painted is, as sir Joshua Reynolds observes, precisely similar to that of fresco; and it is undeniable that Raphael was a better painter in fresco than in oil. In the former branch of the art no one is supposed to have so nearly approached perfection: in the practical details

of oil painting he has been surpassed by many. His creative powers were rapid, unlimited, and correct; and the bold and open manner of fresco, enabled him to execute with facility, all that he conceived without effort, and, as it were, by intuition. The ideas came warm from his mind, with all their first freedom and vigor; whilst the more elaborate process of oil painting checked his genius, and the very labour which he bestowed upon it, tended to lessen the energy and gracefulness of his conceptions. I would appeal in confirmation of this, to any one of the Cartoons. In spirit, in animation, and grace, nay in force, many of the countenances are superior to any which can be found in his finished paintings.

Near the pictures of this immortal artist, are placed several fine works by his favourite pupil Julio Romano. They have great merit, but possess scarcely any of those qualities which characterize the productions of his master.—The mind of Julio was not kindred to that of

Raphael: he should rather have been the scholar of Michel Angelo.—To a perfect knowledge in every branch of his art, and to great "*academic prowess*," he joined a high degree of intrepidity and energy in composition; but I do not think that Nature ever placed in his hands her "*golden keys*." Even his masterpiece, the *Martyrdom of Saint Stephen*, which is in this collection, fails to awaken our sympathy: we applaud the skill of the artist, but we contemplate the picture unmoved. A single figure by Raphael or Michel Angelo, has more power over the mind than all the combinations of Julio Romano.

The paintings by Leonardo da Vinci are singularly interesting, though perhaps not of greater merit than some of his works which we possess in England. The picture of *Saint John the Baptist* is admirable, and that in which the *Virgin and Child* are seated amidst rocks, although the style of composition is somewhat antiquated, is impressive and beautiful. The Portrait of *La Gioconda*, I have no

doubt, merited its high fame. The face has suffered greatly from time, but the eyes retain their peculiar and piercing expression. The right hand is perfectly preserved. It is, without any exception, the most beautifully-painted hand I have ever seen. The softness and roundness of the flesh are miraculous. The finishing of the entire picture is the most exquisite imaginable; nevertheless I doubt the truth of the anecdote, that this single portrait occupied the artist for four years, and was at last, in his own opinion, left uncompleted.

The works of Leonardo deserve more detailed commendation, but my letter has already exceeded all reasonable limit.

LETTER VI.

PAINTING.—*Correggio.*—*Titian.*—*Giorgione.*—*The Bolognese School.*—*Domenichino.*

THE works of Correggio are the great novelty in the gallery of the Louvre.—England, rich as she is in paintings, did not until very lately possess a single authentic picture, of any note, by this great master.* Here are nine, and amongst them some of his most

* One of the finest pictures by Correggio—*Christ in the Garden*—has been brought to this country by the Duke of Wellington. It belonged to the Royal Collection in Spain, and was found in Joseph Buonaparte's carriage when taken after the battle of Vittoria.

famous productions;*—the Marriage of Saint Catherine,—the Saint Jerome,—and the Jupiter and Antiope. The two first of these have wonderful beauties, but not unaccompanied by faults.

The *Marriage of Saint Catherine* is an exquisite piece of colouring, equal in force and effect to Titian, and with much greater softness and harmony; the manner in which the light is distributed is quite unequalled; but

* The following list of the pictures by Correggio is extracted from the catalogue of the Museum:

1.—Le Repos en Egypte.—Ce tableau est connu sous le nom de *la Madònna della Scudella.*

2.—Le Christ couronné d'épines.

3.—Le corps de Jésus mort, sur les genoux de sa mère évanouie.

4.—Le Mariage de Sainte Catherine.*

5.—Tête de Saint Jean-Baptiste, enfant.

6.—Le Saint Jérôme.

7.—Le Martyre de Saint Placide.

8.—Jupiter et Antiope.*

9.—Jupiter et Léda.

* The two pictures thus marked were in the old Royal Collection.

the expressions of the countenances are far from appropriate: the Virgin is handsome, but not dignified; the child bears no mark of divinity; nor is there any religious fervour in the countenances of Saint Catherine and Saint Sebastian.

With the *Saint Jerome* you are acquainted, by the fine copy from the pencil of Lodovico Caracci in the Marquis of Stafford's collection;—at least with the composition; but there never lived an artist who could follow Correggio in the astonishing beauty and truth which exist in parts of this picture. The faces of the Virgin, and of the angel near her, have a bewitching reality and grace of which no description, nor any copy, can convey a just idea. A living smile plays round their features. The Child is the loveliest representation of infancy I ever saw. Yet in this as in the former picture there is a want of elevation in the expressions: the faces are more beautiful than humanity, but not more dignified. We turn to the paint-

ings by Raphael on the opposite wall, and in the mild sublimity of his Madonnas, see all that is wanting to the perfection of Correggio. No part of the arrangement of this picture has much title to praise, and the folds of the draperies are broken and ill disposed; but the chief fault, and that to which nothing can reconcile me, is the gaunt unaccordant figure of Saint Jerome. Considered by itself it has merit, but it would be difficult to find any composition in which there is so great a disunion as between this figure and the rest of the group.

I have hurried over my praise and censure of these two fine productions to bring you to the third,—a work which in its kind is in my opinion perfectly unrivalled.—The first quality of painting is the power of delineating character and passion, in such a manner as to seize and domineer over the mind. This quality, which is vaguely expressed, or rather included, in the general term—composition,

I shall venture *to denominate* mental *potency.*—

Si forte necesse est
Indiciis monstrare recentibus abdita rerum,
Fingere cinctutis non exaudita Cethegis
Continget: dabiturque licentia sumta pudenter.*

By the term *mental potency* I would express, the effect which the subject produces on the spectator, the ideas which it communicates, the emotions it excites. By composition, I would understand merely the arrangement by which this is effected;—the means, and not the result.

If you will permit me to use this phrase I would observe, that if mental potency be the first quality in painting, it follows that the Cartoons and the Transfiguration are superior to any production of which the chief merit is in the execution; and, consequently, that when I assert that Correggio's picture of the Antiope is unrivalled, I am far from ranking it with the works of Raphael.

The *Jupiter and Antiope* exhibits all those excellences which we are taught to consider as possessed by Correggio alone, and without a rival.—The union of colour, the blending of light and shade by invisible gradations, the absence of all sudden transitions, the magic of harmony, the perfection of beauty and of grace, or if Sterne had not imprisoned the words, the "*correggiescity of Correggio.*"

I well remember my surprise, the first time I entered the painting room of your acquaintance Mr. ———, at the machinery it contained for producing defined shadows,—and I remember too, the smile with which he replied when I asked the reason for giving to the face whilst painting an appearance such as it could never have in reality. A picture he told me, required more defined and stronger shades than those in nature; without them it would be weak, flat, and insipid.

I did not then, nor will I now, dispute the correctness of this assertion, but Correggio had the power, perhaps peculiar to himself, of

giving effect and relief without such assistance. There is not in any part of this picture, a single shade stronger or more defined than would actually be seen on figures in the open air; yet is the effect perfect and most powerful.

Antiope is reclining on a sloping bank close to the foot of a tree, her right arm thrown back over her head. She is sleeping. At her feet is Cupid, also asleep. Leaning forward round the tree, Jupiter, under the form of a Satyr, lifts up the drapery which covers the Nymph. In spite of the subject the picture is perfectly free from indelicacy; there is nothing which can offend the most fastidious modesty.

In the brown hue of the Satyr, and the bluish tint of the Cupid, Correggio has, perhaps, sacrificed a little to contrast, but the colouring of the Antiope is the exact hue of nature,—a perfection which I never saw in any other picture. We extol, and not beyond its merits, the colouring of Titian;

but in how many of his best pictures are the carnations rather picturesque and harmonious than the true resemblance of nature. In looking at his lovely roseate tints, or at those perhaps still more lovely which approach to brown; although the figures are painted so as almost to produce delusion, it is less the exact representation of the flesh which we admire, than the power and force with which the object is portrayed. The figure of the Antiope is precisely the real colour of a most fair-complexioned woman. The general tone of the figure being thus subdued, has enabled the master to give to the cheeks a glow of heat, without in the least destroying the delicacy of the countenance. The drawing of the figure has been taxed with incorrectness; but the face, although from the foreshortening I should suppose it of very difficult execution, is of the most correct and perfect beauty. The forehead, the nose, and the closed eyes, are inimitable: the lips seem parted by the breath.

Antiope and Cupid are both in profound sleep; but with wonderful felicity has Correggio expressed the difference of their slumbers.—Cupid, contented with his success, and certain of his prey, sleeps void of care;—his very mind is sleeping. The Nymph is oppressed with heat, there is a slight expression of anxiety in her countenance which shews her mind not to be at ease. The body sleeps, but fancy is awake. We are certain that she is dreaming, and that her dreams anticipate her love. Artists I believe consider the marriage of Saint Catherine as a picture in which more elaborate skill is shewn; but in pleasing effect it is certainly inferior to the Antiope.

The *Martyrdom of Saint Placido* is a singular production. The figures, not to say the worst of them, are ungraceful, and the composition is vile; but the picture possesses in a high degree that breadth and harmony which characterizes the master.

The collection is rich in the works of

Titian; they are all fine pictures, but not equal in merit to many which I have seen in England. *Christ carried to the Tomb* is an excellent painting, and there is more sublimity in the composition, than this great Venetian was accustomed to display in his religious pictures. The *Pilgrims of Emmaus* is also an excellent painting; and,—had the figure of the Saviour equalled in merit that of the Apostle, who rises up from the table as by a sudden impulse of surprise, and leans forward with intent yet respectful curiosity,—it would have been indeed a noble painting. But scriptural subjects were not Titian's *fort;* the regions of heathen mythology were those best suited to his genius, and in those he best succeeded. The gallery does not contain one of his pictures of this class. There are eleven portraits by him, all admirable.

Of the famous *Martyrdom of Saint Peter the Dominican* you will expect a more particular account. It is one of the most mag-

nificent productions in the Louvre; and I feel and acknowledge its great excellence: yet let me confess, that in my opinion the powers of Titian were not calculated to give such a subject its full effect. The prince of colourists should not have abandoned the realms of beauty for those of horror;—for horror of such depth and sublimity as Michel Angelo could perhaps alone have successfully depicted.

In colouring and execution this picture leaves nothing to be desired; but these perfections do not fully strike the eye until the painting is minutely examined, the operation of transferring it from wood to canvass having destroyed the transparency of the colouring, and rendered it much darker than it was before. The position of the picture is such, whether by design or accident I know not, that towards the middle of the day the sun shines full upon it. It then glows with all its original splendor, and the effect is wonderful.

The figures have great merits, and great faults. The merits are in a considerable degree distinct from the subject, the faults radically affect it. By far the best figure, and that for which the picture is chiefly famed, is the wounded friar, the companion of Saint Peter. The emotions of fear and anxiety for himself, and sorrow for the destruction of his friend, are strongly and finely blended in his countenance: nay, his attitude declares the double workings of his mind. Self-preservation hurries on his steps, but the uplifted arms speak the grief with which he forsakes the dying man. The attitude of Saint Peter shews clearly that he has fallen after a vain resistance to superior strength. His face is admirably painted. The features are contracted in death, but his eye is fixed with penetrating keenness on the assassin. Had somewhat less fear, and more resignation, been expressed in the countenance, it would have been perfect.

Although both these figures must be con-

sidered as successful, they are still liable to censure. We feel that without lessening its propriety, much greater dignity might have been thrown into the attitude of the saint; and, in that of his companion, the fine expression I have noticed, has not been obtained without giving somewhat of a theatrical air to the figure. But the most grievous charges against this composition remain yet untold The dying saint, unable to pronounce —"*Credo*,"—traces the word with his finger on the sand. To comment on the utter depravity of taste in this would be superfluous. He should have "*died and made no sign.*" The assassin commits a double murder; the picture as well as the inquisitor are his victims. The drawing of this figure, the most prominent of any in the piece, is allowed to be extremely incorrect; and nothing can be imagined worse than his attitude, or more detrimental to the picture. He is striding over the body of the fallen Dominican, awkwardly, and with constraint. The position is

that of strong effort, but of effort ill applied; it is totally devoid of grandeur or picturesque grace, which, in painting, should be bestowed even upon murderers. This is so mean-looking a fellow, that the Saint must have blushed to have been murdered by him. The great masters of the terrible and sublime were not thus illiberal to their agents.

There is one part of the picture which demands unbounded, unqualified praise;—the back ground, or rather the landscape. In execution, effect, and accordance with the business of the picture, it is not approached by any thing I have ever beheld. Simple and true to nature, it gives a reality to the scene, which the ideal horror of Salvator's deserts would have failed to produce.

One of the finest pictures by Titian which the French possess, is the *Danae*, at the Luxembourg. It is in his best manner; and in brilliancy of colouring far exceeds the Marquis of Stafford's lovely Venus *à la Coquille;* but were I to choose between the two, I should

not for a moment hesitate in rejecting this. The Venus is, in beauty and expression, the most astonishing picture I have ever seen. The first time I visited the Luxembourg, three English artists were copying the Danae: the same number of French artists were conferring a like honour on the more *exalted* productions of the Baron David.

With the pictures by Giorgione I have been delighted. The *Lesson on Music*, and the *Concert in the open air*, for depth and brilliancy of colouring, and powerful expression, cannot be exceeded.

The Caracci, and the other chief masters of the Bolognese school, have contributed many very noble pictures; but, encircled by the works of Raphael, Correggio, Titian, and Rubens, they fail to produce their full effect. *Domenichino* shines beyond all the rest: I have never seen any pictures by him at all to be compared in excellence with five or six which are in the Louvre. His masterpiece, the *Communion of Saint Jerome*, is one of the

number. Every part of this performance, with the exception of the principal figure, deserves the highest praise: but never was there an instance, in which the want of elevated conception in a single point, was so injurious to the entire composition. The figure of the Saint is finely painted, and his attitude is natural, but it is unsightly, disagreeable, and low, and spoils the picture considered as a whole.

In his *Lectures on Painting*, Mr. Fuseli places the Academy of Bologna far below the elder schools of Italy; and, in so doing, he has unquestionably assigned to it the just degree of rank to which it is entitled.

LETTER VII.

PAINTING. — *Rubens.* — *Modern School of French Painting.—David.*

THE pictures by Rubens which are in the Louvre would by themselves form a noble collection. No inconsiderable portion of the immense extent of the Gallery is filled with the altar-pieces by his pencil, taken from the principal churches of Antwerp, Ghent, and the other cities in the Netherlands. These pictures, which rank among his most celebrated works, are of very large dimensions, and in the most perfect state of preservation.

The Elevation of the Cross, the famous Crucifixion, and the still more famous Descent from the Cross, may be considered as

forming one series; and to these I shall confine my observations.

The first of the three, the *Elevation of the Cross*, is far inferior to the other two. The subject has been a favourite with many of the best artists; yet, in my opinion, it is little adapted to the purposes of painting. The activity of the scene destroys its solemnity; and horror and repugnance are rather excited, than sorrow, love, and veneration.

In the instance of the picture before us, it is impossible that the contemplation of it should produce in any mind, those sensations with which the representation of our Lord's death should be always viewed. The composition is good, and in parts, the design excellent, barring his usual defect of making the figures too short, which is more observable in this than in any of his other pictures. The colouring is far below his general brilliancy of tone. It is yellow and disagreeable.

The *Crucifixion*, as to the general distribution of the figures, the freedom and truth

of their attitudes, the execution, the colouring, and all the practical parts of the art, cannot be too highly praised. It is, however, liable in some respects, as a composition, to the same censure as the preceding. It fails to produce the proper effect on the mind of the beholder. By the mode in which the subject is treated, the figures of the two thieves are rendered equally prominent with that of the Saviour; our commiseration for whose sufferings is destroyed by disgust at the lively representation of their's. We turn away from the picture with sensations bordering on those with which we should shun the real view of culprits suffering death. This, I am well aware, is a proof of the powerful effect of the piece; but it is not the effect which should be produced by any picture in which our Lord is introduced.

The *Descent from the Cross* is not only the masterpiece of Rubens, but is considered as one of the most celebrated paintings in the world.—In grandeur, harmony, and force of

colouring, in masterly and judicious management of the chiaroscuro, in design, and in composition, it is beyond all comparison the finest of his religious pictures.

The figure of the Saviour is, I should imagine, the finest representation of death that exists. Art cannot approach nature more closely, than in the cold and drawn-down features, the heavy hanging of the head, and the lifeless weight of the body. The countenance of the Virgin is beautiful and pathetic: her altitude full of dignity. She stretches forth her hand, as if to guard from violence the descending body of her son; yet is this action so felicitously expressed as not to disturb the deep tranquillity of her grief.

Great as are the merits of the picture, they are not unaccompanied by defects. Rubens did not possess that solemn dignity of mind which such a composition demanded, to make it perfect.

The attitude of Saint John is natural, and

suits the office in which he is employed; but it is undignified and awkward, or at least ungraceful; and his countenance is too little expressive of grief and solicitude. He appears scarcely attentive to what is passing. The man on the arm of the cross, poising his body by the extension of his leg, is an admirable figure, but is more suited to ordinary occupations than to the event represented; there is too much in it of activity and actual labour. The assistant on the opposite side, his hands being employed, holds between his teeth the white sheet which is spread under the body of Christ. This idea may be natural, but it is unpardonably low. Amongst the historic faces portraits are introduced, greatly injuring the effect of the picture. That which the artist has bestowed on Saint Joseph of Arimathea, borders on the comic, from the smooth fatness of the features. The two female figures in the front of the picture are portraits not only in countenance, but in dress: and nothing can be more discord-

ant than the contrast between their modern and inelegant attire, and the simple drapery of the Virgin. That figure of the two which is intended for the Magdalene, is looking out of the picture. Almost always this is injurious to effect; but here it is doubly improper, as her hands are employed in assisting her companion. The expression of her countenance, though in tears, is not suited to the occasion. It is an ordinary, worldly sorrow.

All this detracts from the solemnity of the picture. We view it with admiration as a painting, but the subject does not seize upon the mind. We approach it, and we depart from it, without any alteration in our feelings. The unrivalled brilliancy of the execution has, I think, dazzled the world; and prevented the merits of the composition from being justly weighed.—It may appear paradoxical to assert, that Rubens never painted a finer picture than this, and yet that he was not qualified to paint it. Such, however, must be the case, if his scriptural pieces are deficient in

the most important attribute,—dignified grandeur of conception.*

The astonishing mind and genius of Rubens ranged with facility over the whole extent of the art, but are seen in perfection only in works of fancy, splendor, activity, and bustle. —His huntings, his battles, his bacchanalian scenes, his allegories, his fiery soldiers, his animated statesmen, — these are subjects in which he merits, our unqualified admiration, and in which he stands almost without a rival.

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* Sir Joshua Reynolds, mentioning the *Descent from the Cross*, says, that it had suffered greatly from cleaning and repainting; and that in parts it was chipping off, and ready to fall from the canvass.* I examined the picture minutely, after it was taken down from its station in the Louvre, both whilst it stood leaning against the wall, and, subsequently, when it was lying on the floor. The picture appeared to me extremely perfect, nor did I see any marks of its having been retouched. It is painted not on canvass, but on wood.

* Sir Joshua Reynolds's Works, Vol. II. page 279.

Such being my opinion, you will not be surprised, that I prefer the series of paintings at the Luxembourg, to his works in the Louvre. I have visited the former several times, and always with increased admiration.

The critics, who coldly blame the luxuriance of ornament, and the mixture of allegory and real life, which distinguish these pictures, are blind to the real intention of the master. He knew how much he gained by thus boldly and systematically sacrificing propriety to splendor. Had he done otherwise, the pictures, instead of their present interest and animation, would have been converted into a tame recital of dull historical facts.

The fame of Rubens might safely rest on this single work; which displays not only the powers of his imagination, and his facility in composition, but in their fullest extent; his brilliancy and harmony of colouring, his strong expression of character, and his grand taste in landscape. Rubens can

never be seen more completely like himself, or more unlike every other painter.

The pictures are in the highest state of preservation, and in the gallery for which they were originally painted. Like all the rooms of this description in France, it is unsightly from its extreme narrowness, not being more than twenty feet in width.

The paintings have been placed close together, to make room for four other pictures, two of which are by Rubens;—the *Triumph of the Catholic Religion*, and *Elias in the desert* receiving food from the hands of an angel. The latter is a very fine performance: the figure of Elias is powerful and dignified.

These two pictures are at the entrance of the gallery, one on each side, and are divided from the series of the Marie de Médicis pictures, by two very large productions from the pencil of the "great" Baron David.—One represents Brutus just having entered his dwelling, after the condemnation of his sons;

—the other, the Horatii, swearing to their father that they will return victorious, or perish on the field. They are both, as you may imagine from their subjects, pictures of the very highest pretensions.

In composition, colouring, and expression, I think it is hardly possible for any thing to be more contemptible. They are caricatures of all the faults of Poussin; but unredeemed by the smallest portion of the energy, pathos, and sublimity, of that impressive artist. Amongst Rubens's rich freedom, the stiff unmeaning stone-work of David looks like the cut yew-trees of a Brentford villa, transplanted into a region of luxuriant oaks.

When we parted in London, you requested me to give you some account of the present state of the art in France. I am little qualified to do so; as it is difficult, whilst surrounded by a profusion of noble works, to examine with attention what are so decidedly inferior. Added to this, many of the paint-

ings on which the French most pride themselves are at present not visible. The subjects they represent being the victories of Buonaparte, the government has deemed it expedient to cover them with green cloth. If their merits correspond with their size, they must be the finest pictures in the world.

In addition to the works by David which I have just mentioned, I have seen two or three of his portraits. They are splendid paintings; and he is highly skilled in all the mechanical part of his profession. His faces have that strong appearance of individual expression, which inclines you, without knowing the original, to pronounce them to be likenesses. But his portraits are no more to be compared to those by Lawrence, than the well-looking ladies and gentlemen of Sir Peter Lely to the breathing and intelligent forms of Vandyck. Indeed, I could mention several other English artists greatly his superiors in portrait; and as for history,

I may save myself the trouble of comparison, by asserting, that to me they appear absolutely devoid of any merit, except correctness of design.

In the lofty style of historic painting, of which he and his school arrogate to themselves the exclusive possession, the dramatic management of the subject is the essential attribute. In none of their compositions, with which the prints have made us familiar, can a single instance be shewn, in which the subject is treated with grace and dignity; or in which nature is followed judiciously, and without affectation.—Not a single instance can be adduced, in which a fine idea is simply and felicitously expressed.

The largest collection of modern French paintings which I have yet seen, are the portraits of the Marshals, in the hall of the Tuileries. I particularly examined these pictures; thinking from the consequence of the persons painted,—at least at the time when they were painted,—and from the de-

stination of the pictures, that they would be the careful productions of the best artists. None of them can be considered as good pictures:—none of them deserve a higher character than I have given of those by David.

You have sometimes taxed me with the common fault of underrating the works by English artists of the present day. However unjust I may be towards them, I am at least convinced, that the merit of our school greatly exceeds that of France.

You will laugh at the gravity with which I, an Englishman, claim the superiority for England: but the self-complacency of the French will keep me in countenance. Yesterday we visited the Palais du Corps Législatif. In one of the saloons,—I believe that in which the nobles wait to receive the King, in order to conduct him into the Chamber of Representatives,—were several gallic daubings of vast dimensions,—gods, goddesses, and so forth. One of these appeared to me somewhat English in the colouring, and though inferior not totally

unlike some of those unhappy productions which annually adorn the subordinate rooms of the Royal Exhibition. Our guide was a remarkably civil and intelligent personage; and I,—wishing to make a complimentary speech, and really half-inclined to fear that some of my countrymen were guilty,—exclaimed in a questioning tone—Ah! an English picture?—The guide answered not a word, but turned round and looked at me, with such a smile of contemptuous surprise and pity, as no features but those of a Frenchman could express, and which I shall not attempt to describe.

LETTER VIII.

PAINTING.—*Removal of the Pictures from the Louvre.—Vandyck.—Lairesse.—The Dutch School.—The French School.—Poussin.*

THE glories of the Louvre are drawing to their close.—During the last two days* a great number of the pictures have been removed; and that part of the gallery, which was filled with the productions of the Flemish masters, is become little else than a wilderness of empty frames. We expect that the richer treasures of Italy will shortly disappear; as it is understood that Canova, who has been some time in Paris, will be-

* The removal of the Flemish pictures from the Louvre took place on the 18th, 19th, and 20th of September, 1815.

gin his operations, as soon as the agents of the King of the Netherlands have completed their's. Till now the Museum might have been considered as remaining undisturbed; the statues and pictures that belonged to Prussia, being the only things which had been moved. These Prince Blucher took away without ceremony, the first leisure day after his arrival at Paris. They were few in number, and comparatively of little interest; nor did their removal injure even the uniformity of the collection. But the gallery has now lost its splendor, its regularity, and its tranquil appearance. Instead of the servants of the household, numerous files of Prussian and Austrian soldiers are posted from one extremity to the other. The day before yesterday we found the Louvre closed; and a written order from the King was affixed to the door, stating that the public were not to be admitted.—Yesterday the Museum was open. The King's domestics, and the usual sentries of the National guard, had

disappeared: and in their places were stationed Prussian soldiers. We have since learnt, that in the early part of the morning the directions of the Court were enforced; but that subsequently a Prussian officer with a few men came to the door, and on being refused admittance by the National guards, who pointed to the King's written injunction, he very deliberately took the Frenchmen by the shoulders, and sent them about their business. He then tore down the placard; saying that he cared no more for the orders of Louis, than he did for his Guard.—The fragments of the paper which remained hanging to the door, attested the truth of this story.

Such conduct on the part of allies and sworn friends is not exactly courteous.—There is no doubt that it was merely intended to close the gallery during the removal of the Flemish pictures; the court being naturally anxious that the public should not witness so humiliating a transaction.

The French, always vain and *déraisonnés*, confidently asserted that the King had shut up the gallery, to prevent the Allies from stealing its contents: and on the day when crowds of English were in vain besieging the entrance of the Museum; the French rabble formed a circle round them, grinning and delighted at the evident misery of the foreign connoisseurs, *flentes in limine primo.*

But the scene was soon changed. — This morning, the same rabble has been assembled to witness with astonishment and rage, the removal of the immense number of pictures which have been taken down during the last two days.—It has long been certain that the collection would be broken up, but the Parisians, particularly the lower classes, could never bring themselves to believe that such an event was possible.*

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* The loss of the stolen treasures of the Louvre, was a circumstance which the French had never been taught to consider as within the verge of possibility. In the

By the permission of the Dutch officer, who had the *command* of the gallery, we remained in it yesterday until a late hour; anxious to see the removal of Rubens's fine pictures.

The persons employed were French workmen of the lowest class. We conjectured that they were well paid, as they all seemed in high spirits; and many of them,—a thing extremely rare in France,—were evidently intoxicated. They were left very much to their own guidance; the only persons to superintend them being two or three Dutch commissioners, who did little else than direct

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catalogues of the Museum, which were published by authority, the description of the Transfiguration terminates by informing us;—"*C'est à la Victoire que la France doit ce chef-d'œuvre,* qui lui était destiné." And after mentioning that the Belvidere Apollo had remained in the Vatican for three centuries, the admiration of the world, the writer adds;—"*Lorsqu'un héros, guidé par la Victoire, est venu l'en tirer pour la conduire* et la fixer à jamais sur les rives de la Seine."—The *Seine!*

the order in which the pictures should be taken.

One of these Dutchmen, a strange-looking animal, was affected with so lively a gaiety as almost to dance round the pictures as they lay on the floor. He assured us, that it was the happiest day of his existence: that he lived at Antwerp, and that now he could go to church in comfort: but that he did not care how soon he died when the pictures were once safe at home; as their return was the only wish of his heart.—The Frenchmen, on the other side, were vehement in their declarations, that more persons were requisite to the safe removal of the paintings.—We thought, that amongst the strange chances which these pictures have experienced, not the least singular, was the danger they were then exposed to from French drunkenness and Dutch vivacity.—I believe however that none of them sustained any injury.

Amidst this scene we took our leave of

the Flemish division of the gallery. Its chief riches were the pictures by Rubens.

The works of Vandyck were many of them extremely fine; but, with one exception, his portraits the least so. The picture to which I allude was an *Ex-Voto*, in which history and portrait were unequivocally blended. This open disregard of rule is much less repugnant to good taste, than the introduction of even a single portrait in a regular historical painting.

On the right of the picture, Vandyck has represented the Virgin in all the dignity of flowing drapery, holding on her knee the infant Christ. They are excellent figures. On the left are the giver of the picture and his wife, of course in their proper costume, kneeling and imploring the divine protection.—These two portraits are as admirable as any which the artist ever painted.

Vandyck, in his historical pieces, although he did not reach the Italian purity of taste, certainly approached nearer to it than Rubens.

But in powers of conception, in invention, and in the strength of natural genius, he is not to be compared to his master. As a portrait painter, he was the finest artist that ever lived;—for if his portraits yield to those of Titian in the exact imitation of nature, they are superior in the powerful expression of character; certainly the most important attribute of the two.

In examining the paintings by Lairesse, I was surprised and vexed to find, that Sir Joshua Reynolds's beautiful idea, in his picture of Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy, was not entirely his own. I was the more vexed at this, as I had always ranked it amongst his best compositions, possessing great elegance of thought, and out of the common track.

The picture by Lairesse represents *Hercules placed between Virtue and Vice.* The subjects are so allied, that a slight similarity might have been casual; but in these two productions, the attitudes of all the three

figures are exactly similar; and there is the same beautiful expression of internal decision in the countenance of Hercules, as in that of the comedy-loving tragedian. The figures in this piece, as in Sir Joshua's, are somewhat more than half lengths. I regret that our countryman was a borrower; but I am certain that it was contrary to his ingenuous nature to borrow, and be unwilling to acknowledge the obligation.

The pictures by the masters of the Dutch school stand little chance of obtaining that degree of attention which they really deserve. —They are overwhelmed by the profusion of nobler things. Rembrandt, if indeed he can properly be classed with this school, must always constrain our attention and admiration, whatever artists may surround him; but his works in the Louvre, although numerous, are not to be compared with many which are in England.

The portion of the gallery, allotted to the

French painters, contains much finer pictures than I expected to have seen. Of course the French have not omitted to place here, the two fine artists of the Italian School,—Poussin and Claude Lorraine; the former only of whom was born in France; and both alike purely Italians in all that relates to their art. But my commendation is without reference to their works: the paintings really French, are those of which I speak. Some of the performances of Le Sueur, Le Brun, Coypel, and Vernet, are excellent.—Le Brun's small pictures are much more pleasing than his battles; and Vernet's landscapes, although not composed with so much genius as Wilson's, are better paintings: their only fault is a want of softness.—None of the productions by living French artists are permitted to have a place in the gallery.

Amongst the landscapes by Claude Lorraine, there is not one which can be considered as a first-rate picture; and not more

than two which deserve even to be called good. But of the works of Nicolo Pouss n there is a noble assemblage. Four or five of them are equal to any of his which I have ever seen.—In sublimity they are inferior to his *Sacraments;* but are, perhaps, more admirable in the execution.

Colouring was unquestionably Poussin's least excellence, yet in this collection there is one of his pictures,—the *Deluge,*—in which the effect produced by the mere colouring is most singular and powerful. It conveys to the mind such an image of the destroying element, as no exposition of its actual effects could have produced. The air is burdened and heavy with water: the earth, where it is not as yet overwhelmed, seems torn to pieces by its violence; the very light of heaven is absorbed and lost. Never was there a performance in which the execution was more in accordance with the subject.

With this picture I shall take my leave of the gallery. My letters have been unreason-

ably voluminous, yet have I passed unnoticed a vast number of productions, which deserve high commendation.

The future letters which I shall have the pleasure of addressing to you will be devoted, if the operations of Canova permit me, to the Halls of the Antique.

LETTER IX.

SCULPTURE. — *Comparison of Sculpture and Painting.—Antique Sculpture in England.—The Belvidere Apollo.*

FEW questions relating to the fine arts have been more frequently, or more warmly debated, than the respective claims to pre-eminence of sculpture and painting. Every painter demands the first place for his own peculiar art; he urges the advantages which are derived from colours; the animation and variety which result from them; and the power they afford of exactly representing nature. But the main argument, and that on which he deems the victory secure, is the extent of combination, almost unlimited in painting. This, the skilful employment of which he

justly ranks as the highest perfection of his art, he considers as belonging almost exclusively to the pencil; as few works of sculpture consist of more than a single figure; and, where it is otherwise, the powers of composition are of necessity confined within limits too narrow to be brought into competition.

The less numerous, but no less zealous band of sculptors, challenge, in a still bolder tone, their right to precedence. Grandeur, dignity, and sublimity, are the characteristic excellences on which they rely: the superiority of their art in these they consider as undeniable. They admit the variety, and the approach to the appearance of nature, which painting derives from colour; but urge, that sculpture possesses variety of which painting is incapable. A picture presents but one image; a statue may be contemplated from many different points of view, and from each assumes a different appearance; an almost endless variety of beautiful contours are of-

fered to the spectator. A painter imitates nature in form and colour; but his imitation is merely delusive: a sculptor only imitates form; but his imitation is not delusive, it is actual. In other words, a picture is but the appearance of form; a statue is the reality of form. They admit, that painting is more generally attractive than sculpture; but they account for this, in such a manner as to exalt their art. Painting, they say, is calculated to excite pleasure, sculpture admiration; the world would rather be pleased than astonished; hence the popularity of painting; they are careful however to add, that what is admirable, is nobler than what is pleasing.

The very nature of their material, they conceive, gives dignity and importance to their art. Colours fade, and the forms which they embellished are lost; but marble may almost be considered imperishable. Zeuxis, Apelles, and Timanthes, are names;—the sculptors of Greece still live and are admired in their works.

I will not attempt a formal decision of the question; but certain it is, that the Louvre has wrought a change in my opinions. I left England preferring painting to sculpture: I shall return with very different ideas. This, I think, must be the case with many of our countrymen: we possess a large proportion of the finest works of the pencil, but are comparatively poor in sculpture.

In the collections at the British Museum, at the Earl of Pembroke's, and at Mr. Hope's, are many beautiful specimens of ancient art; but what are they, when compared to those which surround us here? The Elgin marbles are, probably, some of the finest works which the chisel ever produced; but, alas! they are only the wrecks of sublimity and grace. Though of the highest interest to the man of taste, and invaluable to the student and artist, it would be affectation to deem them, because they are the work of Phidias, equal in value, as they now exist, to the undiminished splen-

dor of the Apollo. Do not think me inclined to underrate the worth of these marbles; or that I am amongst those, who blame the measures which were taken to rescue them from destruction.—I consider the Elgin Collection as an acquisition of the highest value and importance; and that England will rejoice in its possession, long after every vestige which Athens now retains of the art shall have been destroyed by its barbarous inhabitants.

I foresee that you will be indignant at my thus ceasing to give the preference to your favourite art; but it is certain that I am a convert to sculpture. The effect which it produces on the mind is deeper, and more intense, and more permanent, than that caused by pictures. Passages in poetry have given me much higher delight than I ever received from painting; poetry never affected me so strongly as the contemplation of the Apollo.

I wish, and yet I am almost afraid, to speak of this statue: I dread your considering my

praise as bombastic, although I am convinced that my expressions will not convey all the admiration which I feel.

The Apollo is, in my opinion, not only the finest statue in the Louvre, but totally of a different order from all the others: it must be classed by itself—alone. The Torso and the Laocoon certainly, and perhaps several others, exceed this figure in the execution: in grace, in beauty, and even in dignity, it is not unrivalled. But that which separates it from every other work of art, that which exalts it so high above every thing which surrounds it as to defy comparison, is the divinity which pervades the whole; the remoteness from the appearance of mere humanity. I know that this expression of divinity could not exist unaccompanied by grace, dignity, and beauty; yet it appears not to be caused by them: it is a separate and distinct attribute of the figure; intrinsic, independent, and superior to every other.* Equal grace, dignity, and beauty, might exist

conjointly, and yet this divinity, this exaltation above what is human, not be the result. In several other statues these perfections are blended in very high degrees: I will instance the Venus de Medicis, and the Belvidere Mercury. The Venus is replete with dignity, and and in beauty and grace far superior to the Apollo; yet is there nothing which constrains us to deem it the representation of a goddess; nothing which elevates it above human nature. The Mercury, to great dignity and grace, joins beauty of form and countenance, at least equal to the Apollo; yet is it still a question whether it represents a god, or a mortal; Mercury, or Antinous. The present deity of the Apollo defies all such doubt.—This expression of divinity is so powerful, that I cannot conceive it possible for an illiterate person, or even a child, seeing the statue, to ask—What *Man*, the figure is meant to represent.

The moment which the sculptor has chosen, is the happiest which it is possible to imagine:

—the termination of action, and the commencement of rest; combining energy, and tranquillity. I recollect no other instance of this happy union. By far the greater number of antique statues are represented in repose; and unquestionably this is the state best fitted for the purposes of sculpture. In the representation of action, even when most successful, the additional energy scarcely compensates for the want of that pleasing effect which only results from tranquillity. The combination of the two must be considered as one of the pre-eminent and peculiar merits of the Apollo.*

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* The point of time which is represented, is that just subsequent to the dismissal of the arrow; the course of which the god follows with his eye. The left arm still retains its position; the fall of the other is not completed, and appears as if suspended by attention. The same impulse has advanced the right leg, obliquely, one step from the position in which the act of drawing the bow would have required it to have been placed. Some critics have objected to this attitude; conceiving, that in disobedience

The attitude is the most majestic and imposing, and yet the most gracious imaginable: and the contours which it produces exceed, in abstract elegance and beauty, any lines I have ever beheld in painting or in sculpture.

It has been remarked by Sir Joshua Reynolds,* whose opinions in all that relates to the fine arts are entitled to the highest deference, that sculpture yields to painting in the power of giving expression to the countenance. If we admit this to be true generally, at least the statue before us is an undeniable exception. It is impossible to point out any face in painting, in which the energies of the mind are so strongly, and so completely expressed, as in the features of the Apollo. All the blended

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to the received rule, the opposite arm and leg are not antagonized. others have quarrelled with it, as not being the proper attitude of an archer. Had they rightly understood the position, they would have perceived that the censure was unfounded.

* Sir Joshua Reynolds's Works, Vol. II. page 21—25.

feelings of the god are written in characters impossible to be mistaken ;—lofty indignation and displeasure, the tranquillity of assured success, the smile of conquest, the contempt of the conquered. The figure and countenance indicate no anxiety for victory, no exertion to obtain it ; the god is displeased, and punishes ; too disdainful for anger, too powerful for contention : he is not one of Homer's gods, overmatched by an earthly adversary, wounded, fearful, and flying.

This masterpiece of art has been most nobly, most correctly described, by a poet of the present day.

———" In settled majesty of fierce disdain,
" Proud of his might, yet scornful of the slain,
" The heav'nly archer stands—no human birth,
" No perishable denizen of earth ;
" Youth blooms immortal in his beardless face,"

* * * * * *

" All, all divine—no struggling muscle glows,
" Through heaving vein no mantling life-blood flows,
" But animate with deity alone,
" In matchless glory lives the breathing stone.

"Bright kindling with a conqueror's stern delight,
"His keen eye tracks the arrow's fateful flight;
"Burns his indignant cheek with vengeful fire,
"And his life quivers with insulting ire:
"Firm fix'd his tread, yet light, as when on high
"He walks th' impalpable and pathless sky."

* * * * * *

"Contagious awe through breathless myriads ran,
"And nations bow'd before the work of man
"For mild he seem'd, as in Elysian bowers,
"Wasting in careless ease the joyous hours;
"Haughty, as bards have sung, with princely sway
"Curbing the fierce flame-breathing steeds of day;
"Beauteous as vision seen in dreamy sleep
"By holy maid on Delphi's haunted steep,
"Mid the dim twilight of the laurel grove,
"Too fair to worship, too divine to love."

This most sublime statue has descended to

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* The Belvidere Apollo.—A prize poem by the Rev. Henry Hart Milman, of Brazenose College.—Recited in the year 1812.

us in a state of admirable preservation:* the marble is of a beautiful and dazzling whiteness; and the figure, though not really so, is in appearance the least injured of any in the collection. It is very generally reported, both by the French and English, that it is destined by the Pope as a present to the Prince Regent; but I do not flatter myself with any hopes that this is true. So transcendent do I consider the merit of the Apollo, that were I to decide, for my country, between the possession of this single figure, and all the other statues in the Louvre, I hardly doubt my giving the preference to the former.

I have been frequently asked by French

* This statue was discovered at Nettuno, formerly Antium, towards the close of the fifteenth century. The name of the artist is entirely unknown. Antium was the birth-place of the Emperor Nero; and in the palace, which was his summer residence, were assembled a great number of the finest works of sculpture, selected in Greece by his freed-man Acratus.

people in the Louvre ;—" When will the Duke of Wellington begin to take away pictures and statues?"—That France was never able to take any thing from England, and that consequently our General can have nothing to remove ;—is so obvious an answer for an Englishman to make, that it requires the exertion of all his good-breeding to resist the temptation.

LETTER X.

SCULPTURE. — *The Group of the Laocoon.— The Venus de Medecis.*

In my remarks on the productions of the pencil I have ventured, with more rashness I fear than judgment, to impute faults to works which have long been esteemed by the world as entitled to unqualified praise: but I am now come to "the very head and front of my offending;" and must risk your indignation by the still more rash act of censuring one of the most admired productions of antiquity;—one, which the critics of all ages have ranked high amongst the masterpieces of sculpture;—the group of the Laocoon.

High celebrity is never permanently bestowed where great excellence does not exist.

The production in question deserves its high celebrity, for it has transcendent beauties. But I think, that dazzled by these beauties, its admirers have praised it for merits which it does not possess, and have overlooked imperfections the existence of which cannot be denied.

The Louvre contains no production of a more masterly execution, than that of the principal figure in this group. The attitude is bold, correct, and of great effect, the anatomy unrivalled in truth, and the proportions and contours are of the most perfect elegance. Higher still are the merits of the figure when considered with reference to the event. The grandeur and elegance of the attitude are obtained without the slightest sacrifice to propriety; it is that attitude which would be most natural to a man similarly exerting himself, and whose strength was rapidly decreasing. One effort pervades the whole frame: the strong action of the arms extends to the other limbs, and is visible in every muscle; the inflated neck, the drawn-up sinews of the leg and foot, all are

in accordance. The position of the head is grand, and singularly affecting: pain, horror, and despair, are marked in the countenance; and with eyes raised to heaven, the victim appears at once to supplicate and accuse the gods.

Such if I estimate them rightly are the merits of this transcendent figure; or rather such would be its merits did it exist separately. But it appears to me, that the other two figures which compose the group, possess little merit in themselves, and are greatly injurious to the principal figure. They destroy its propriety, its interest; and lessen in a greater or less degree almost every merit which it possesses.

To them I object a total and most offensive discordance between their size, as compared with that of Laocoon, and their age, as shewn by their countenances, and by the formation of their limbs. The youngest of the two youths, judged by this standard of size, is quite a child; whilst his countenance and figure indicate a nearer approach by several years to pu-

berty. Against the figure of the elder Son, the same objection exists still more strongly. His features, and the formation of his limbs, speak him of that age when youths are arrived at their full height; and differ only from men in the greater lightness of their proportions; yet his comparative size is that of a mere boy.—This discordance is the first thing which strikes the eye; and the more the group is contemplated the more strongly it is perceived.

The attitudes and countenances of both the sons are graceful, and indicate pain and embarrassment; but of a far lighter nature than belongs to the event. The expression of misery might be censured as deficient in strength, were the youths represented as about to be separated from their father, and led bound into captivity. How ill calculated then must the figures be to express the horror, the agonizing pangs, the convulsive efforts, of children gasping in the tightened folds of fierce and deadly serpents. The effort of the youngest son to remove from his side the fangs of the snake is

finely conceived, and finely executed: but in his attitude, and in that of the other youth, there is a freedom of action totally inconsistent with the supposed restraint.

The approach of death is visible only in Laocoon; yet we cannot but imagine that the weakness of youth would render the sons more rapidly victims to the poison than the father, who is represented in the full strength of manhood.

Such, in my opinion, are the improprieties in the figures of the two youths, glaring when separately considered, more glaring when contrasted with the perfections in that of Laocoon. —In him, the attitude and expression of countenance are suited to the event, and consequently discordant with those of his children, rendering them tame and unnatural; and at the same time a contrary effect is in some degree produced, and their comparative tranquillity gives to the father an air of overwrought vehemence and suffering. The composition, considered as a whole, is as discord-

ant as the effect would be, if the tragic event were brought upon the stage, and Laocoon were to speak with the vehemence and truth of Shakespeare, and his children with the cold unnatural elegance of Racine.

But there is still a more important fault in the composition.—The father in his attitude, his exertions, his look, has nothing which unites him to his children. They implore his aid, but his efforts are for himself alone.* Fine and noble were he represented singly, thus connected his energy becomes unnatural, selfish, and displeasing. Children on the verge of destruction are in the presence of their father, yet is no paternal feeling expressed. All the affections of the parent, which we are taught to believe powerful even in death, appear lost and absorbed in the sense of his own calamity, in his efforts to prevent it.

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* Laocoon is represented endeavouring with his right arm to extricate himself from the folds of one of the serpents; and with the left, to remove from his side the fangs of the other.

This is the great the fundamental fault in the composition; this it is which deprives it of its effect on the mind; deprives it of all the pathos with which the representation of such an event might have abounded. The figure of Laocoon now affects us merely as the image of a man severely suffering,—not as the representation of a father, whose woes are rendered tenfold by his inability to protect his children.

It has been ascertained that the group is formed out of five distinct blocks of marble. I have not been able to trace the divisions; but I should rejoice were it to be discovered that the principal figure might have been executed separately from the other two. I would then assert that they were spurious additions made by some later and inferior artist. But I fear that the fact is otherwise; certainly it is otherwise, if as it is generally believed, this is the group mentioned by Pliny.*

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* Deinde multorum obscurior fama est, quorundam claritati in operibus eximiis obstante numero artificum, quoniam

Virgil, it has frequently been said, was indebted to this work of the chisel for his noble description of Laocoon's death. This surely

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nec unus occupat gloriam, nec plures pariter nuncupari possunt; sicut in Laocoonte, qui est in Titi Imperatoris domo, opus omnibus et picturæ et statuariæ artis præferendum. Ex uno lapide eum et liberos draconumque mirabiles nexus de consilii sententia fecere summi artifices Agesander et Polydorus et Athenodorus Rhodii.

Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. xxxvi. cap. 5.

The supposition that the existing group of the Laocoon is not the one so highly extolled by Pliny, is founded on the circumstance of its not having been discovered exactly in the place which that writer mentions: and it is asserted, that in the exact place which he does mention, fragments of serpents were found, very finely executed, and clearly belonging to a similar group.

By the manner in which Pliny speaks of Agesander, Polydorus, and Athenodorus, in other passages of his history, it is supposed that they flourished during the age of Pericles or shortly afterwards; but the back part of the group not being finished in the same manner as the front is considered as evidence that it was not executed during the period when the art was in its perfection. The Athenian statues brought to England by Lord Elgin, from their position on the pedi-

was not the case: the story is very differently told by the poet. In the Æneid, the serpents first destroy the children, their father being

ments of the Parthenon, could only be viewed at a distance, and in front; yet they are as minutely and as highly wrought at the back as in any other part. Pliny's describing the three figures as formed *ex uno lapide,* cannot be deemed conclusive evidence against the authenticity of the production; as even at present it is difficult to trace the joining of the different pieces of marble.

The French connoisseurs believe that the existing group is the one mentioned by him; but from the style of the sculpture they consider it to have been executed during the first century of the Christian era, consequently nearly five hundred years after the time of Phidias. Lessing is of the same opinion.—Few questions in antiquity are involved in greater doubt than the origin of this noble production. Of its recovery to the world the particulars are correctly known. It was found in the year 1508 by Felice de Fredis, in a recess in the ruins of the baths of Titus, at a little distance from the spot on which the palace of the Emperor is supposed to have stood. Julius the Second rewarded with his usual princely munificence the fortunate discoverer and his sons.

absent; he, hastening to their assistance, is afterwards overpowered and slain.

> " Illi agmine certo
> " Laocoonta petunt: et *primum* parva duorum
> " Corpora natorum serpens amplexus uterque
> " Implicat, et miseros morsu depascitur artus.
> " *Post,* ipsum auxilio subeuntem ac tela ferentem
> " Corripiunt, spirisque ligant ingentibus: et jam
> " Bis medium amplexi, bis collo squamea circum
> " Terga dati, superant capite et cervicibus altis.
> " Ille simul manibus tendit divellere nodos,
> " Perfusus sanie vittas atroque veneno;
> " Clamores simul horrendos ad sidera tollit."

The whole passage is finely imagined.—The approach of the serpents, their movement over the sea, their terrifying aspect, are described with wonderful power. The words " Diffugimus visu exsangues," are artfully introduced to raise our conception of Laocoon's paternal tenderness and courage: but the termination of the story I have always considered as one of the happiest expedients in the whole range of poetry.

"At gemini lapsu delubra ad summa dracones
"Effugiunt, sævæque petunt Tritonidis arcem:
"*Sub pedibusque deæ, clypeique sub orbe teguntur.*"

Opposite to the entrance of the Hall of the Apollo, and close, and as it were in contrast, to the group of the Laocoon, stands the Venus de Medicis. A spectator therefore may command at one glance the three most celebrated works of imitative art. Of two of these I have spoken at considerable length; and if I am about to pass more rapidly over the third, it is not because it is less deserving of attention, but from my feeling the impossibility of justly describing it.

To say that the merits of a thing are beyond the powers of description, is an accustomed form of high-flown eulogy; the phrase may with the most perfect truth be applied to the statue of the Venus de Medicis.

A good copy of the Apollo, or even a correct engraving, although it might not lead us to imagine the transcendent degree in which the merits of the statue exist, would clearly

enable us to understand in what those merits consisted: I do not think it possible for any copy of the Venus to convey the slightest idea of the effect which the original produces.

The statue is sadly mutilated; the fragments are not well put together; and in one or two places in which parts have been chipped off, they have been restored with marble much whiter than the rest of the figure. All these imperfections at first sight offend the observer, and prevent the merit of the statue from being perceived: but when it is contemplated with attention and for some time, these defects fade from the eye;—they are lost in the magic beauty of the form. There is no phrase which can adequately describe this charm, it is entirely *sui generis*. Harmony of proportion, grace, elegance, aerial lightness, buoyancy, softness, delicacy, are all applicable to the figure, but none of them give any idea of its powers of fascination. *Bellèzza leggiàdra*, the term which the Italians use in speaking of it, perhaps comes nearest to the truth.

I have said that it is impossible for those who have not seen the Venus de Medicis to form any conception of its beauty; but if there were degrees of impossibility, I would assert, that it is still more impossible for any person who sees it frequently and with attention not to feel its bewitching attractiveness.—It is one of the miracles of art.

LETTER XI.

Observations on the essential Attributes of Sculpture.—The Laocoon.—The dying Gladiator.—The Gladiator of the Borghese.—The Discobolus after Myron.—The Diana.—The Meleager.—The Hermaphrodite.

The added study of each day strengthens my opinion, that the master charm of sculpture is tranquillity.—How well the ancients were convinced of this, is obvious from the very large proportion of statues which are completely in repose. The representation of strong passion, or any kind of violent mental or bodily exertion, is objectionable; but still more to be objected to is the representation of rapid motion. I am well aware that there appear to be many splendid exceptions to the truth of this.

You will at once oppose me with some of the finest statues in this collection ;—the Laocoon, the Gladiators, the copy of the Discobolus after Myron, and the Diana. Let us examine how far these statues do, in reality, make against the proposition which I would enforce.

In speaking of the *Laocoon*, you must understand me as referring to the principal figure of the group only. Laocoon is represented in strong exertion, and agonized both in body and in mind ; yet such is the admirable skill of the artist, that we contemplate the figure without horror or disgust ; it excites no sensation which is painful to the mind ; admiration and pity are the feelings which it produces, and we dwell upon the work with pleasure. The artist therefore has succeeded eminently, and the figure of Laocoon must be admitted as a complete exception to my rule ; but I consider it the only one.

The *dying Gladiator*,* in beauty and truth

* The French connoisseurs have altered the denomination

of form, and in execution, is among the finest productions in the Louvre. In mental potency it may be ranked as third in the collection. To what are we to ascribe the effect of this statue on the mind, and the interest, and the commiseration which it excites? Solely, as I conceive, to the tranquillity which reigns in the attitude and countenance. The Gladiator is wounded mortally. Aware of his approaching death, he is solely occupied by the desire of meeting it with calmness, and as may become a man of fortitude and courage. He is reclining on the ground, and with the right arm sustains his body, which leans somewhat forward with great appearance of weight and feebleness; the other arm rests heavily on the

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of this statue; and I think on sufficient grounds.—The short and bristling hair, the beard on the upper lip, and the collar which hangs round the neck, lead them to consider it as the representation of a barbarian warrior,—a German or a Gaul. They termed it,—*Le Guerrier Blessé*. The sword is of the Roman shape; but it, as well as that part of the plinth on which it rests, is modern.

right thigh. The countenance indicates strong pain tranquilly and silently endured: he exerts himself to bear up manfully to the last; but the rapid decline of strength is visible throughout the whole frame, and the bending down of the neck shews the lassitude of approaching death. Nothing can exceed the expression of determined composure both in the countenance and figure. It is this expression which exalts the Gladiator into a hero with whom we sympathize, and whose fate we deplore. Were this tranquillity, were this resignation, absent; were he represented in rage, or in despair; or did his fortitude, in any degree, sink beneath his calamity; he would be a mere swordsman, for whom we should feel no interest; and our admiration of the statue would extend only to the correctness of its execution.

The other *Gladiator* is reckoned one of the seven wonders of sculpture;* and I think

* The following are accounted, by the critics, the seven principal statues—the Apollo of the Belvidere; the Laocoon;

justly. The figure is represented in all the energy of contention; but the moment which the artist has chosen is one, I must not say of rest, but at least of pause from motion. The left arm is advanced to receive the blow of his antagonist; the right is drawn back ready to strike, but the blow has not commenced,—may not commence for some moments. This is all that sculpture requires; you may contemplate the statue for hours without being offended that this pause still continues. Were the blow commenced, were the arm represented as in the act of descending, the truth of the attitude would be falsified though viewed but for an instant. The coun-

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the Venus de Medicis; the Farnese Hercules; the Gladiator of the Borghese; the Antinous, now denominated the Belvidere Mercury; and the Meleager. Six of these were in the collection of the Louvre; and by what chance the Hercules escaped the rapacity of the French I know not: its size could scarcely have been its protection, as they transported from Italy, colossal figures of nearly equal dimensions.

tenance adds dignity and interest to the figure; nothing can be more admirable than the air of stern tranquillity and perfect self-possession with which he scans his adversary. This expression, admirably suited to a combatant about to strike, would be inconsistent were the blow represented as commenced. The change of feature, which would have been necessary to suit the latter circumstance, would have deprived the statue of one of its most powerful attractions. The beauty of form in this production, and the union of strength and activity, cannot be surpassed: there is an elasticity and lightness which one could hardly conceive it possible for marble to express.*

* This statue is no longer considered as the representation of a Gladiator. The letters which compose the inscription, by the high antiquity of their form, prove it to have been executed at a period when Gladiatorial sports were unknown in Greece. It is supposed to have formed one of the figures in a group of combatants. The statue was discovered at Nettuno, in the same place, and at the same time, as the Belvidere Apollo.—It is the work of Agasias of Ephesus.

The *Discobolus* is represented in strong and rapid action, the moment which the sculptor has chosen being that when the sweep of the arm is half completed. I would appeal to this figure as a full confirmation of my assertion, that the representation of rapid movement is incompatible with the perfection of sculpture. The statue has great beauty of form, great anatomical correctness, and the attitude, which I should imagine to be one of extremely difficult execution, is given with perfect truth. Yet with all these merits, there are very few statues in the Louvre on which the eye is less inclined to dwell. In contemplating it, no other sensation is excited than surprise at the skill of the artist. The praise of Myron which has descended to us,—that he was peculiarly famous in the representation of nature,—seems to imply a want, at least a comparative want, of the higher attributes of genius and taste. This idea is confirmed by the production before us; it displays the power of imitation in the highest degree, but is not ennobled by any sublimer quality.

A still stronger argument in my favour is afforded by the *Diana*. The goddess, in her rapid course, suddenly perceives some object of her indignation, towards which she turns her head with a look of stern and eager displeasure. The bow is ready in her hand, and she is about to draw the fatal arrow from the quiver. The grandeur of countenance and form denote a being of a superior order: the action of the arms is finely conceived, and executed with success: yet from all this there results a figure which neither interests nor delights. Whence does this failure in effect arise? To me it is obvious, that it is solely to be attributed to the impropriety of seizing, and making permanent, an attitude which in reality must vary too rapidly for the eye to follow. The figure contradicts itself.* It will not I think be argued, that this objection applies to

* This statue may be considered as the best specimen of a class which has become very numerous in modern times; all the Dianas, Daphnes, and Atalantas, being constantly represented, *standing still at full speed.*

all action; and that the arm of the Diana, which is raised to take the arrow, or even the attitude of the Apollo, are censurable on the same principles. The slightest pause, the slightest possibility of pause, is sufficient to satisfy the eye, and to remove the impropriety to which I object. It may however be remarked, that the few instances in the antique, in which any action is going on, prove that the masters of the art either deemed it not essential, or that they mistrusted their powers of successfully representing it.

The perfection of sculpture I consider to be the union of bodily tranquillity and mental animation. If either of these is wanting, the effect which is produced on the mind is imperfect. One of the most celebrated statues in the world is perhaps somewhat to be censured for the want of this combination. Nothing can exceed the beauty, manliness, and graceful ease, of the *Meleager*; but had greater mental energy been thrown into the countenance, the figure would have more powerfully attracted us.

The *Hermaphrodite*, in beauty, softness, and grace, ranks unquestionably next to the Venus de Medicis; and there is somewhat of similarity in the style of the two productions; but, independently of the unpleasantness of the subject, the face is totally without animation, the figure being represented as in undisturbed sleep; and indeed the attitude is such as only to permit a partial view of the features.

The conclusion which I would draw from the preceding observations is this;—That as grandeur and dignity are the peculiar characteristics of sculpture, all that is foreign to them is to be avoided, all that is conducive to them is to be sought;—that the representation of violent exertion, and rapid motion, are therefore inconsistent with the perfection of the art; and that subjects of tranquillity and ease, animated by the milder energies of the mind, are those in which alone this perfection can exist.

The essential attributes of grandeur and dignity, which in the Grecian models approach even to severity, appear to have been too much

abandoned by modern sculptors; motion, action, passion, have been resorted to as means of giving effect and interest to their productions. This, and the not less censurable introduction of meretricious ornament, may be reckoned among the causes which render the works, in this branch of art, so immeasurably inferior to the antique.

LETTER XII.

SCULPTURE.—*The Antinous of the Belvidere.—The Torso of the Belvidere.—The Faun in Repose.—&c. &c.*

I HAVE already had occasion incidentally to mention the Antinous of the Belvidere; but this production, from its high celebrity, demands to be noticed more in detail.

The statue of the *Antinous* is of most exquisite workmanship, and may perhaps be considered as unrivalled in the beauty and correctness of its proportions. Its pre-eminence in these points can scarcely rest on stronger grounds, than our knowledge that Poussin, who of all painters was the most attentive to the proportions of the human figure,—attentive indeed to a fault,—considered it as the best guide which the antique afforded. This beauty

of form is accompanied by dignity, grace, and the most perfect ease; and the combination renders the statue one of the most pleasing objects art has ever produced. Beauty may indeed be considered as its chief characteristic; and, if it be in any point liable to censure, it is, from the deficieny of that sublimity of expression which sculpture demands, and which, existing in its highest perfection in the age of Phidias, appears gradually to have declined under succeeding artists.

The contents of the Louvre abundantly prove that the Grecian sculptors, who flourished at Rome under the Emperors, were as skilful workmen as the earlier masters of the art. The inferiority of Roman sculpture, when compared with that of Greece, is not in the execution, but in the conception; and I think that the various periods of the art are by nothing marked so strongly, as by the gradual change from severity and grandeur to mere elegance and grace.

The chronology of antique statues, notwith-

standing all the theories which have been laid down to determine the different epochs by the different styles, is still involved in obscurity. The artists and connoisseurs are not yet able to determine, whether the Laocoon is a production of the age of Pericles, or of Vespasian; periods distant from each other by an interval of five hundred years: and an examination of the marble of which the Belvidere Apollo is formed has given rise to a conjecture, that this statue, the noblest and most sublime in the world, is only a Roman copy of the oracular statue at Delphos.

The Belvidere Antinous is one of the many statues of which the French have altered the denomination. The *Savans* have determined, that the figure represents the Messenger of the Gods, and not the favourite of Adrian. The countenance unquestionably bears no resemblance to that which we see on all the statues, busts, and medals of Antinous; but yet I much doubt its having been designed for Mer-

cury, or indeed for any of the gods. There is no attempt at superhuman elevation in the style of the features; and the attitude is not simply one of repose, but conveys an idea of fatigue, or at least of lassitude, inconsistent with divinity. It has by some persons been considered as a figure of Theseus. To me, this appears the most probable conjecture.

The effect of this beautiful production is greatly diminished by its mutilated state. The right arm is wanting from the shoulder, and the left hand is broken off at the wrist. It is to be regretted that the deficient parts of this statue, and of the Meleager, have not been restored. From the identity of form, which sculpture possesses, any mutilation in a statue gives to the whole an appearance of deformity. This is not the case in painting: parts of a fine picture may be defaced, and yet the general effect be little injured: and the chief argument against all attempts to restore paintings does not exist with regard to sculpture.

In painting, the original traces of the master's hand are destroyed by the operation: in sculpture the restorations are merely additions, leaving what is original unaltered and untouched.

Had the Transfiguration been ten times more injured by time, and French chemistry, than in reality it was; had it been the merest ruin, it would have been of infinitely more worth than the splendid mass of Parisian colouring which has destroyed it: but can any one, who contemplates the perfect form of the Apollo, wish that the statue had remained in the defective state in which it was discovered.*

When Lord Elgin applied to Canova, on the subject of restoring the Athenian sculpture, that admirable artist gave it as his opinion, that any such attempt would be improper and unsuccessful. The good taste and judgment of this decision cannot be doubted; the injuries of time and barbarism having unhappily been

* The right arm of the Apollo, from the elbow, and the left hand, are modern: they were the work of Giovanni Angelo da Montorsoli, one of the pupils of Michel Angelo.

too extensive, and too indelible, to admit of reparation. But the case is far different when parts of a statue, which retains in other respects its original splendor, are broken or lost.—It would be profanation to repair the beautiful ruins of Tintern-abbey; but were a pillar of Salisbury cathedral to fall, we should deem it an extraordinary refinement of taste, not to replace it.

The *Torso of the Belvidere* must be classed amongst those relics of antiquity, of which to attempt the restoration would be alike presumptuous and absurd. I cannot but consider this fragment as one of the proudest triumphs of art. The body, from the lower part of the shoulders, and the thighs, are all that remains of the figure; and the attitude is such as to render the mutilation particularly detrimental to the effect. That elegance, dignity, and ease, should exist in such a fragment, and should so exist as forcibly to strike even the most uninformed observer, must be considered little short of miraculous.

All artists I believe concur in opinion, that the grandeur of style, in the execution of this statue, is not surpassed by any piece of sculpture, not even by the Laocoon. The body leans somewhat forward, with a little depression of the right shoulder: the corresponding elevation and depression of the muscles are given with astonishing boldness and freedom; yet the truth of nature is not in the slightest degree exceeded. A symmetry the most perfect reigns in every part. That the figure represented Hercules, is rendered certain by the lion's skin covering the rock on which it is seated, and by the vigorous conformation of the body. It is also clear that it formed part of a group; and from the circumstance of the veins not being expressed, which in antique sculpture is one of the characteristics of divinity, Winckelmann conjectures that it represented the hero after his deification, and that the accompanying figure was that of Hebe.

Although I have now spoken of all the statues which are considered as holding the first

rank, I cannot quit the Halls of the Antique without declaring my admiration of some few of the other masterpieces contained in them.

The statue of the *Faun in Repose* is one of the most pleasing in the whole collection: the figure and countenance are of extreme beauty, and the attitude is the most graceful imaginable. That union of animation and tranquillity which I consider so essential as the perfection of Sculpture, is perhaps displayed in a greater degree in this statue than in any other.

The *Roman Orator*, formerly considered as a statue of Germanicus.—The symmetry of the figure is perfect; the attitude simple and imposing: but the grand and peculiar merit of the production is the astonishing expression of mind in the countenance: the right hand pointed backwards over the shoulder finely assists this expression. We are never wearied with contemplating the statue.—"*Qu'il raisonne bien!*" I heard a French lady, who was looking at it, exclaim, not conscious that she spoke aloud.

Antinous, under the figure of Aristœus.—The execution of this statue may almost be called rude; but there is an approach to human nature and to life in the countenance and attitude, and an expression of serious contemplation, which give it a peculiar charm.

The *Centaur and Infant Bacchus.* — The artist has shewn wonderful skill in so combining the two forms in the Centaur as to produce a figure not displeasing to the eye. The Bacchus is a perfect and lovely representation of infancy: the graceful attitude of the child, and his air of playful domineering, cannot be surpassed.

The statue of the *Silenus, with the Infant Bacchus in his arms,* although it has suffered very much from time, from accidents, and apparently from exposure to the open air, is still one of the finest works in the Louvre. In grandeur of conception and in execution, it yields to very few.

The Boy taking a Thorn from his Foot.—The beauty and ease of this figure cannot be sur-

passed, and the appearance of adolescence is given with surprising truth. It is about half the natural size, in bronze, and very little injured by time.

There are not less than twelve statues of Venus, many of them extremely fine; but until the Venus de Medicis was taken from the Louvre, it was almost impossible to admire them. We lost the Venus some days ago:* nothing else has yet been removed from the Halls of the Antique.

Amongst the great number of other female statues, the most admirable are I think the Amazon, the colossal figure of Melpomene, and the Leucothoe with the Infant Bacchus.

The Museum boasts one fragment of the frize of the Parthenon. It is of exquisite beauty, but sadly mutilated. Excepting this, and the celebrated group of the Faun with the hare and panther, none of the works in relievo

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* The Venus de Medicis was taken from the Louvre on the 25th of September, 1815.

are at all comparable to those in Lord Elgin's collection.

The busts are very numerous, and of singular interest, as a great part of them are believed to be original representations of the most celebrated personages of Greece and Rome. Many of these are finely carved: but as pieces of sculpture, the busts which appear to me the most admirable are the two following.

The *Faune à la tache.*—It is impossible for any work in marble to be of a more finished execution. Laughter and animation are very finely expressed in the countenance; but its chief value is the wonderful perfection of the workmanship: it is quite miraculous.

The other bust is of a very different description, and in my opinion of infinitely greater value.—It is a colossal head of *Antinous*, in remarkably fine marble, and grandly executed. The features are of the most exquisite beauty; and there is an air of melancholy seriousness, a little tinged with severity, which renders it the most attractive countenance I ever beheld. The

eyes, having been originally of some rich material, have been taken out; and the hollows left are of considerable size, but happily do not in the least injure the effect. The hair, which flows in loose profusion round the face, is the lightest, and the most natural, I have ever seen in sculpture: yet this is not the result of minute or high finishing; on the contrary it is very little laboured: it is the gracefulness and ease of the contours which constitute its beauty.

Thus much on the subject of antique sculpture: in my next letter I shall speak of the present state of the art in France.

LETTER XIII.

SCULPTURE.—*Modern School of French Sculpture.*

I SIT down to fulfil my promise of giving you some account of the modern sculpture of France.—On this subject I cannot speak in more favourable terms than those I have used in describing their present school of painting.

France appears to me decidedly inferior to England in this branch of art: national prejudice may perhaps bias my judgment; and some allowance should be made for the disadvantage arising from an immediate contrast with the antique.

All the palaces and public buildings are crowded with statues and busts, in marble, in bronze, and in plaster. The best collection of

these works which we have seen, are the fourteen marble statues which ornament the fine staircase leading to the *Chambre des Pairs*, at the Luxembourg.* They are well executed, and some of them have great animation; there is perhaps too much sameness in the attitudes, but the whole together produce a very striking effect.

The four immense colossal statues, which are in front of the *façade* of the palace of the *Corps Législatif*, are in very good taste, and show great boldness and freedom in the execution. They represent the four greatest Legislators of France; Sully, Colbert, L'Hôpital, and D'Aguesseau: they are in their proper costume, and are seated.

There is unquestionably something peculiarly imposing in the effect of colossal statues: but

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* The personages represented are Kléber, Hoche, Desaix, Dugommier, Joubert, Caffarelli, and Marceau, as generals; and Beauharnais, Mirabeau, Thouret, Barnave, Chapelier, Vergniaux, and Condorcet, as statesmen.

this effect is destroyed when they are placed in rooms, or in contrast with figures of a smaller size.*

By far the most interesting production of modern art, which I have seen at Paris, I could almost say which I have ever seen, is at the Bibliothèque Nationale, now the Bibliothèque du Roi. It is a statue of Voltaire, by Monsieur Houdon. He is represented in his arm-chair, and in his ordinary negligent dress of a cap and fur gown: both his hands are resting on the elbows of the chair; and he is leaning forward, not in the act of speaking, but appears rather to be eagerly waiting to utter some brilliant idea which has struck him whilst listening to the person by whom he is addressed. The vivid rapidity of mind is more strongly

* The ill effect of such contrast is strikingly shewn in the bronze group erected in Russel-square to the memory of the late Duke of Bedford. The secondary figures which encircle the base of the statue convert it, from the colossal figure of a man of the natural size, into the representation of a giant.

expressed in this countenance than in any picture or statue I ever saw. Nay, it has a still greater merit; it is not abstract animation, but precisely that sort of vivacity which characterized the man: it is a portrait of his malicious, subtle facetiousness. It is much to be regretted that this fine production should be of so perishable a material as plaster of Paris. It is coloured to resemble bronze; and the eyes are of a darker hue than the other parts of the face: this perhaps may not be in good taste, but it certainly adds to the expression of the countenance.*

Houdon is still alive; and has a room allotted to him in the building; but I have not been so fortunate as to meet him.

In the library is another specimen of sculpture; infinitely more in the French taste, and which I am inclined to believe they value much more highly. We applied to one of the attendants

* In the Hall of the *Théâtre Français* there is a copy of this statue, in marble; but the spirit of the original is lost.

for information respecting the statue of Voltaire: after he had very intelligently answered our questions, he added with great animation; "*But have you seen the French Parnassus?*" Not to have seen it was almost impossible, as it stands in the most conspicuous situation which the library affords; the centre of the largest room. *Le Parnasse Français* is a little brass mountain, stuck over with little brass figures. Louis the Fourteenth, reclining on his lyre, personates Apollo, his features and wig admirably qualifying him for the office: the Graces are equally well represented by the three learned ladies, Mesdames de la Suze, and des Houlieres, and Mademoiselle de Scuderi: Moliere, La Fontaine, Boileau, Corneille, Racine, and some other of the chief writers, in full costume, are identified with the nine Muses. That nothing may be wanting to complete the effect, the intervals between these figures are filled up with medallions of the minor wits, musicians, and artists of the

time.* It is to be regretted that one of the noblest institutions in Paris should be disfigured by so paltry a toy. Such absurdities soon cease to be noticed by persons accustomed to the place; but they are the first objects which strike the eye of a stranger; and if it were for this reason alone they should not be suffered to exist.†

* *Le Parnasse Français* was the donation of Titon du Tillet. He conceived the idea of his mountain in 1708; it was completed in 1718; in 1727 he printed a description of it; and for nearly forty years more, he occupied himself in making additions to his choir, and publishing little explanatory supplements to his book.—"*C'etoit un homme d'un grand mérite;*"—adds his French biographer.

† In the library is another curiosity, of much less pretension, but far more interesting. It is a model of the pyramids, or rather of that part of the plains of Egypt in which they are situated. It is about ten feet square, and is accurately made to a scale. Not the pyramids only, but the trees, buildings, and every object, are shewn, and in their natural colours. A caravan, which is represented as passing over the sands, gives the comparative grandeur of the pyramids. No description in words or in painting can convey

Another instance of the French taste in sculpture is afforded us at the *Institut;* but of a very different nature from the one I have just mentioned: that can be censured only as ridiculous and trifling; this is horrid and disgusting. It is a statue, in marble, of Voltaire; and is placed at the upper end of the library. The figure is perfectly naked; and the artist has with laborious accuracy represented the shrivelled, withered state of his emaciated body. He is seated in his chair; and the approach to common life which this attitude gives, adds to the horrible effect. The impropriety of such a figure is obvious; but the degree of disgust which it excites cannot be conceived by those who have not beheld it.

You will tell me perhaps that these are the errors of former days; and that the possession during twenty years of the treasures of Italy

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so strong an idea of their effect, or of the horrid region in which they stand.

must have so purified and elevated the French taste, as to render Paris the Athens of modern times.

In painting, let the pictures of Monsieur David and his school determine how far this is the case.—In sculpture, the facilities given us to decide the point were greater than I expected, and at first astonished me not a little. In more than one of the halls, round the walls of which are ranged the works of Greece and Rome, the central space is occupied by large pieces of French sculpture; some executed in marble, some in plaster; the figures the size of life, and generally in groups;—Heroes in fierce contention,—Gods carrying off damsels,—Furies punishing the wicked. To each is affixed a paper, explaining the subject, and giving the name of the artist. "*To be sold*" is added to some of these notices, for the special information I presume of our rich countrymen. Relying on their known good taste, I think you may hope to contemplate in Eng-

land a fair proportion of these masterpieces of modern genius.

In thus boldly placing them in immediate contrast with all that is most excellent in the art, we may perhaps a little doubt the wisdom and modesty of the artists; as well as the good taste of those persons who have the management of the museum.

I have endeavoured to examine these productions without prejudice, and without any comparison with their neighbours of the elder time. Those which are in marble, have the merit of being highly finished; in no other respect do they appear to deserve commendation.—Bad taste, forced ideas, inelegant and constrained attitudes, and either impropriety or an absence of expression, may be charged against them all. The knowledge of anatomy is ostentatiously shewn; and the minuteness with which the antique is copied in the style of the features, the disposition of the hair, the folds of the drapery, only produce a ludicrous

discordance in the general character of the work.

Of all these productions the most absurdly ridiculous is I think a group representing Orestes pursued by one of the Furies.* Orestes is running for his life; the Fury, in a stately walk, keeps pace with him. In each of her hands she holds a snake; and her arms are advanced with such equality and precision, that the snakes are enabled to seize upon Orestes, one on each side, and between the corresponding ribs. This accuracy is the more to be praised, as Alecto is looking the other way. I must confess myself unable to discover, why there should be this apparent want of attention on the part of the Fury; unless indeed it be finely intended to indicate the tenderness of her nature.

This, is one of the productions which ushers

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* This group is in marble; from the chisel of à Monsieur Dupati.

you into the presence of the Apollo;—this, is one of the happy results of the spoliation of Italy.

Such works, as the one I have described and its companions, are too degraded for serious criticism; yet from the attention which is paid to them by the French visiters at the Louvre, I am led to doubt whether they are not better suited to the national taste, than the dignified severity of the productions by which they are surrounded.

In comparing the sculpture of the present day, not merely the works I have just mentioned, but the much finer specimens which have been produced in England, with the antique; the result is I think very different from that which arises on a comparison of modern paintings with those by the celebrated masters of Italy. In painting, the art appears the same, and conducted on the same principles; but by inferior artists: in sculpture, the art appears lost. The difference between a modern picture, and one of the no-

blest productions of the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, may be defined; and in a degree traced to its causes. It is not so with sculpture; the difference is immense, and admits of no explanation. I will not, in support of this, appeal to any of the chief master-pieces; but instance the *Faun in Repose*. Is there any modern statue which appears a work of the same class; any, which though inferior, appears the result of similar principles, similar skill? In a word, can a single production of modern sculpture be shewn, which would lead us to suppose it possible for the artist so to improve, as to approach the beauty, the elegance, and the sublime simplicity of the antique?

LETTER XIV.

ARCHITECTURE.—*The Façade of the Louvre.—The Palace of the Tuileries.—The Palace of Versailles.—The Façade of the Palace of the Corps Législatif.—The Column of the Place Vendôme.—The Fountain of the Elephant.—The Triumphal Arch in the Place du Carrousel.—Removal of the Venetian Horses.*

THE architecture of Paris and its environs will form the subject of this letter; do not however suppose that I am about to measure all the palaces and churches, and that you are to be overwhelmed with the results.—The edifices are not worth it, nor have I either the science or the leisure requisite for the task.

Very full and I think correct descriptions of the principal buildings have been repeatedly

given; I shall therefore avoid as much as possible entering into any details and restrict myself to general observations.

There is nothing on which the French more pride themselves than the splendor of their capital. In this respect they consider their superiority over other nations clear and undeniable.—In a chance conversation which I held a few evenings ago, in the garden of the Tuileries, with a French officer who had visited England; "You have," said he, "*nothing like these gardens in London. There is very little to see in your capital.—You have Saint Paul's, and Westminster-abbey, et voilà tout.*"

I came to Paris with very moderate hopes of being delighted by the splendor of its edifices; and therefore I cannot assert that I have been disappointed. This city is highly ornamented: it is filled with buildings of show and pretence. At every corner we run against palaces, bridges, triumphal arches, pillars, fountains, churches, and theatres. Paris, in short, is full of finery;

but the lover of pure architecture will meet with little to gratify his taste.

The noblest specimen of the art in Paris is, beyond all comparison, that which they term *La belle Façade* of the Louvre. Many faults have been attributed to it, and no doubt justly, but they are lost in the elegance and magnificence of the whole. It is indeed a building of which any capital might be proud. The other front, which is towards the river, is also simple and imposing. But the far-famed palace of the *Tuileries* is as paltry and as ugly as it is possible for any building to be, which is of great extent, and constructed of fine materials.

This palace is broken into small and ill-proportioned masses; various styles of architecture are introduced, discordant with each other, and overloaded with trivial ornaments. This want of union and of simplicity in the parts, takes from it all that grandeur and majesty which might have resulted from its great extent. But its chief and most offensive deformity, and which, though it were faultless

in every other respect, would exclude it from the rank of beautiful edifices, arises from the construction of its roof, which towers above the face of the building in all possible varieties of ugly and irregular shapes ; and is still further disfigured by numberless high chimneys and fantastical windows. The roofs of the end pavilions, and of the two masses next to each of them, might be instanced as models of architectural deformity.

Versailles, the still more famous residence of the kings of France, is unquestionably a noble structure. It is not only more extensive than the Tuileries, but is more uniform, more splendid, and in better taste. Yet even here we should in vain endeavour to find any approach to exquisite architecture. The front towards the garden is the part most vaunted ; but its shape detracts greatly from its effect. The centre, which is about one half of the whole extent, is advanced so as to form three exterior sides of a quadrangle. From no spot therefore is the whole of the building visible.—

For instance, from a point midway,—to which point indeed your guide leads you, and is indignant if, before you reach it, you turn round to look at the palace — the central part, not only hides the receding sides, but a considerable portion of the wings; whereas, had the centre been thrown back, as is most frequently the case in extensive buildings, all the parts would have been seen; and the perspective of the receding sides would have given variety and grace to the whole.

Of the interior of these two palaces little need be said. The apartments are as splendid as gilding, marble, velvet, and tapestry, can make them; but they are not very spacious, or, generally speaking, sufficiently lofty. There are, however, two rooms which I greatly admire, — the opera-house at Versailles and the grand-gallery at the Tuileries. The former is of very large dimensions, extremely elegant in its form, and decorated with singular magnificence; the whole of the interior, except those spaces which are ornamented with pictures,

being gilded. The part designed for the stage is less than the body of the theatre, but similar in shape and embellishment, and the two can be thrown into one room, which, when lighted up, must be one of the most superb in Europe. Buonaparte, who never inhabited Versailles, permitted this theatre, and all the other parts of the palace, to fall into decay; but its splendors are now to revive.

The grand gallery at the Tuileries, is a most richly-ornamented apartment. Its ceiling is painted chiefly, if not entirely, after the pictures of Annibal Carracci in the Farnese. The entrance is at the side of the room. At each end are two pillars; the whole of the space between which is from top to bottom lined with looking-glass. The effect is very striking.—The gallery is multiplied into almost endless perspective; and you look round with a sort of bewildered astonishment, scarcely knowing where you are standing, or how far you have advanced. I am surprised that none of our wealthy lovers of fine things have

copied this; which certainly is not less sensible, or more costly, than many decorations which they have industriously borrowed from the French.

The gardens of these two palaces, especially that of the Tuileries, are curious and entertaining from the complete specimens they afford of the perfection of ugliness and bad taste.

I will not detain you by any mention of the other numberless palaces, built during the reigns of Louis the Fourteenth, and Louis the Fifteenth. Of the buildings by the former prince, none have any higher merit than that of splendor, except the Louvre, and the church of the Invalids; nor is either of these at all comparable to the faultless elegance of the Chapel at Whitehall.

The Edifices, constructed during the reign of Louis the Fifteenth, are less magnificent, but in better taste than those of his predecessor. Several of Buonaparte's exhibit a still purer style. They are however but sickly imi-

tations of the severe and majestic simplicity of Greece.

The façade of the Palace of the Corps Législatif is unquestionably the finest of the buildings executed during his government. Twelve very large and fine Corinthian pillars sustain a triangular pediment of bold and elegant proportions. A noble flight of steps extends the whole length of the building; and advanced in front are the four colossal statues which I mentioned in a former letter. They are placed, two on each side, on massive square pedestals. This colonnade is in all its parts simple and grand; and its position towards the river, and exactly opposite the Pont Louis Seize, adds greatly to the effect.

The much-talked-of Column of the Place Vendôme is admirable for the richness of its material, and the beauty of its workmanship; being covered from its summit to the very ground with bronze, and ornamented throughout the entire length of the shaft with figures in alto relievo very finely cast. But it is low

and ill shaped when compared to the height and the elegant lightness of the monument in London. Unless viewed from elevated situations, it is but just seen above the buildings which surround it.

With all due deference to the taste of Trajan, and of the commemorators of Marcus Aurelius, I am much inclined to doubt the propriety of adorning the entire shaft of a pillar with sculpture. The eye cannot distinguish the figures beyond the three or four first revolutions; and the spiral, winding round the column, takes from the elegance and simplicity of its form, and hides the graceful swell which constitutes the most beautiful feature of a pillar.

The Fountain of the Elephant, the other work in bronze which Buonaparte was about to execute, would have been by far the more noble object of the two. In the model,* which is the full size of the intended figure, the form

* The height of the model, which is formed of timber and

and peculiar character of the species are admirably caught. The sagacious composure of the countenance, and the massive heaviness of figure, seem in accordance with the immense size. I do not think that a colossal statue equally large of any other animal would produce so fine an effect.

As the model stands at present, there is a plain square castle on the back of the animal, but no ornament whatever. This executed in bronze, placed on elevated but solid ground, and throwing from its proboscis volumes of water into the air, would have been a grand and impressive sight. But we were informed

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iron covered with plaster, is seventy-two feet. It stands under a temporary wooden building, the mechanical construction of which appeared admirable. Mathematical and mechanical science is more active, and more frequently brought into common use in France than in England; and consequently is more apparent. The French artisans are less bigoted to practical rules, and more attentive to the opinions of the man of science, than workmen of the same description with us.

by the person who superintends the work, that when finished it was to have been covered with trappings, and gilding, and all manner of French absurdities, and placed on marble arches in the centre of a canal; surrounded by an hundred bronze figures of men, and by jets of water playing in all directions.—The French have a happy facility in spoiling a fine idea.

The Triumphal Arch, in the Place du Carrousel, has not been ridiculed more than it deserves. It is contemptible in itself, and absurd in its position.* To build a puny arch of fine marble is no great offence; but to crowd together on its summit the matchless Venetian horses, to

* The arch stands in the centre of the Place du Carrousel. The four horses were placed on its summit abreast, and close to each other, harnessed to a triumphal car, and led by two figures, representing Victory and Peace. The horses are of the natural size, these figures were colossal: and with a want of judgment, and a depravity of taste, astonishing even in Paris, the car, the figures, the harness, and all the other ridiculous appendages of the bronze horses, were sumptuously gilded.

hide them from observation by disproportioned figures, a cumbrous car, and gaudy discordant trappings, is a transgression not easily to be pardoned. It was a perpetually recurring annoyance, in our way to and from the Louvre, to look up, and from the indistinct view of their finely-arched necks and spirited heads, to calculate their concealed merit. But their imprisonment is over. Some days ago the Emperor of Austria, in right of his Venetian possessions, removed them from their ill-judged station.*

Of all the long train of humiliations, to which Paris has been forced to submit, this was by far the most severe. The French would not be persuaded that such an event could take place. They asserted, that the mere attempt would cause a universal insurrection; and that the Allies might yet have to mourn the vengeance of an enraged and insulted popu-

* The Venetian Horses were taken down from the arch on the 30th of September, 1815.

laçe. A few hundred Austrian soldiers, foot and horse, kept the good citizens of Paris in order; and the predicted vengeance has been confined to scowls of deeper hatred than those which their features formerly wore.

The removal of the horses, as viewed from the Museum of the Louvre, was a singularly interesting spectacle. The Gallery was thronged with French, it being the only place from which they were permitted to witness the scene; but foreigners of all nations were allowed by the Austrians to enter into the hollow square which they formed round the arch. We descended into the Place du Carrousel for a short time, but did not deem it wise to sacrifice our morning by remaining there. Yet when in the Gallery, it was difficult to abstract ourselves from the event which was going on; and to confine our attention wholly to the pictures.

From the windows towards the Seine, we saw parties of inquiring and indignant French, assembled on the Quai du Louvre: the Austrian cavalry were employed to disperse them. and

shewed no backwardness in executing the task; riding amongst them, and aiding the efforts of their horses by strokes, not sparingly given, with the flat of their swords. The Frenchmen stalked away unwillingly, grinning with rage, and muttering curses.

The other side of the Gallery looked directly on the arch, which was covered with officers, workmen, and spectators. The interval between it and the ring of soldiers was occupied by numerous parties of ladies and gentlemen, chiefly English. On the outside of the guard, the Austrian soldiers who were not employed were carelessly sauntering about, or lying at their ease. At a distance, in the opening of the different streets, large bodies of the people were observed pressing forwards, and driven back by the cavalry. A striking contrast to this bustling scene was afforded by that part of the Place du Carrousel which lies between the arch and the palace of the Tuileries, and which is separated by iron railing. It was silent and desolate, being only occu-

pied by a few persons belonging to the palace, evidently melancholy spectators of what was passing.

All the windows which commanded this view were crowded by mingled groups of French and English, whose contrasted expression of countenance was not the least interesting part of the spectacle;—these all eager curiosity,—those sullenly and ferociously attentive. English ladies were seen contesting places with French officers, whose undisguised animosity appeared rather to amuse than frighten them. Indeed, our fair countrywomen display great heroism, in the perfect unconcern with which they ramble amongst crowds of indignant enemies, no small part of whom would rejoice in their destruction. But in fact all foreigners know and feel the impossibility of the French, whilst a hundred thousand bayonets are at their throats, attempting the slightest outrage. Our sensations are not unlike those of a person looking at a tiger in a cage. He knows his own security, and feels a kind of gratification

in contemplating the innoxious ferocity of the animal.

During the previous night, workmen had been busied in removing the Parisian trappings, and loosening the horses. The English engineers,—whose assistance, as expert mechanics, was requested by the Emperor Francis,—had not therefore been long employed, before one of the horses was seen suspended in air. The French could no longer bear the sight; most of them drew back from the windows, and quitted the gallery, unable to suppress or disguise their feelings. Justice, policy, and good taste, all imperiously demanded that this ill-devised trophy should not be suffered to exist; but it was impossible at the moment not to feel some pity for the humiliation and misery of the French.

In a short time the other three horses were removed, and the dismantled arch has ever since been surrounded by the populace, in sorrowful and astonished groups.

LETTER XV.

ARCHITECTURE.— *Notre-Dame.* — *La Sainte Chapelle.—Saint Ouen, at Rouen.—Internal Arrangement and Decorations of the Churches in France.—Saint Eustache.—Saint Sulpice.—Church of the Hôtel des Invalides.—The Pantheon.* — *The Catacombs.* — *The Museum of French Monuments.*

In speaking of the churches of Paris we should divide them into two classes; those of Gothic, and those of Grecian or modern architecture.

None of the Gothic buildings, which I have yet seen in France, approach in grandeur or extent those of England; but they are interesting to the antiquary, as exhibiting many peculiarities both in their structure and embellishments.

Notre-Dame is a fine building, and could we forget five or six of our own cathedrals we should term it noble. It is very much smaller than Westminster-abbey, but the appearance of the exterior is more venerable and more uniform as to age; and the west front, although censurable for want of continuity of design in the parts, is grand and impressive. Within it is heavy and low, and its general effect is spoiled by the dirty yellow colour of the walls.

La Sainte-Chapelle, which is now converted into a depository for the papers and registers of the *Palais de Justice*, is a Gothic edifice of very small dimensions, but of singular beauty. The windows, which are of painted glass, go all round the building, and are only divided from each other by slender pillars: this produces an extremely elegant appearance, and the stonework of the roof is highly wrought, light, and graceful. The *Sacristie* is modern; the one immortalized by Boileau having been destroyed by fire about fifty years ago. The fate of the *Lutrin* I in vain endeavoured to ascer-

tain: our guide said that *Boileau* was a *bel esprit*, but that all the old reading desks had been destroyed when the chapel was converted into a library.

Beyond all comparison the finest specimen of Gothic architecture which we have met with in France is *Saint Ouen*, the secondary church at *Rouen*. Contrasted with Salisbury cathedral, it is small; but does not I think yield to that, or any other structure I have ever seen, in elegance, lightness, and graceful uniformity.

In the internal arrangement of their churches, the French set us an examaple which I wish we had the good taste to follow: none of their Gothic edifices are deformed by Grecian screens separating the choir from the nave; a rail is the only division between the two parts, and the organ is placed over the western door. The improvement, from the whole extent of the interior being thus thrown open, may easily be imagined; but the absence of Grecian columns, pilasters, and entablatures, placed in immediate and offensive contrast to the general style of

the building, is I think a still more important advantage. It would be difficult to instance a more palpable blunder than this misunion; and yet most of our finest Gothic edifices are disfigured by it.*

The position of the organ over the western door was praised by a gentleman of great musical talents, whom we chanced to meet at *Notre-Dame*, as calculated to improve the effect of the music. He remarked, that a greater number of voices would be required, as the singers must be placed near the organ; but that its tones would be mellowed by the distance; and that the singing would be heard to more advantage, than when as with us the choristers are mixed with the congregation.

My expectations of the magnificence of ca-

* In the French Gothic churches the altars are of Grecian architecture: this is unquestionably as repugnant to good taste as the admission of Grecian screens: but the altars, although of large dimensions, appear rather as ornaments than as constituent parts of the building; and hence the ill effect which they produce is less.

tholic churches have been disappointed. The high altar, and the altar in the Lady chapel, are richly but inelegantly ornamented with gilding, and with marble of various colours. The altar itself is generally in the shape of a sarcophagus; and is decked out with immensely high waxen tapers in splendid candlesticks, and with all the other appendages of catholic worship. Thus far the churches, if not magnificent, are at least respectable in their decoration: but the lateral chapels, on the number and splendor of which the catholics so highly pride themselves, are the very reverse of what their description would lead us to expect. They are filled with pictures, the vilest daubs that can be imagined, representing the sufferings of our Saviour, and the most solemn events in sacred history. On the altars, between ill carved crucifixes and figures of the Virgin and Child, so absurd as to be impious, are jars of dirty artificial flowers, half-burnt tapers, and little glass cases filled with labeled relics. The chapel of each Saint is lighted up

on the day which is assigned to him in the calendar. This lighting up consists in sticking against the walls, by bits of tin, a few tallow candles: these are seen some burnt out, others flaring with the wind, and their grease streaming on the pavement. The general effect of these chapels is tawdry, poor, and contemptible: the absurdities which they contain would in a less sacred place excite our mirth, here they can only be viewed with disgust.*

Of the modern churches in Paris the four finest are *Saint-Eustache*, *Saint-Sulpice*, the church of the *Hôtel des Invalides*, and *Sainte-Geneviève*: the two last are, after the colonnade of the *Louvre*, the noblest pieces of architecture in Paris.

Saint-Eustache displays a most fantastical

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* In the provincial churches these absurdities are carried still further: at Abbeville we remarked triumphal crowns of painted paper on the statues of the Virgin and Child; and in the body of the church were suspended *ex voto* ships of pasteboard.—It is not unusual to see the images in the lateral chapels clothed in garments of silk, dirty and ragged.

combination of Gothic and Grecian architecture; the effect of the whole is bad, but parts are not without a sort of grotesque beauty.

Saint-Sulpice is a spacious and handsome edifice: the portal, though of larger dimensions than that of our church of Saint Martin, is much less noble and elegant. In *Saint-Sulpice* the steps are placed between the pillars, instead of extending uninterruptedly in front: this gives an embarrassed and narrow appearance. The chapel of the Virgin exhibits an architectural trick not uncommon in French churches. At the eastern extremity is a circular recess; in the centre of this stands a group, in marble, of the Virgin and Child. The ceiling, which is in the form of a dome, is painted a light blue colour, and is studded with golden stars: this dome is open in the centre to about half its extent, and above it is a second or false ceiling similarly decorated. The whole is so arranged that the spectator, without knowing whence the light enters, perceives the white

figures standing in a pale mellowed radiance: the effect is extremely good.

The traces of revolutionary devastation are more evident in this building than in any of the other existing churches in Paris.

The interior of the dome at the *Hôtel des Invalides* is small when compared with Saint Paul's, and less exquisitely beautiful in its proportions and embellishments than Saint Stephen's, Walbrook;* but in its general effect it is superior to either. The arrangement of the building is singularly pleasing to the eye; and there is throughout a union of solidity and

* This church, the masterpiece of Sir Christopher Wren, is much better known and more frequently visited by foreigners, than by the English. Standing in an obscure situation behind the towering deformity of the Mansion-house, and completely incased with buildings, it has nothing in its exterior to attract the eye. The situation precluded external decoration; and the whole of the sum granted by the crown, was employed in giving to the interior that perfect elegance and beauty, which ranks it second among the modern buildings of London.

lightness which is quite unrivalled: this results I think from the elegance of the proportions, and the boldness and breadth of the ornaments.

The ceilings of the central dome, and of the four small cupolas which surround it, are sumptuously adorned with gilding, and with paintings of very brilliant colouring. Examined attentively, the pictures will be discovered to have little intrinsic merit; but their faults in composition and design detract little from their effect as splendid ornaments giving richness and dignity to the building. For my own part I confess, that I cannot but consider ceilings, and still more domes elevated to a great height, as improper situations for paintings of excellence: and this for a twofold reason;—from their position a great part of their merits are lost,—and the history of the art furnishes but too many instances how rapidly such works decay. No species of painting is I am well aware of greater difficulty; but surmounting difficulties is not the legitimate pride of art.

Exquisite and wonderful as are the works o this kind produced by the pencils of Miche Angelo, Correggio, and Rubens, may it not be regretted that their talents were so frequently thus employed.

In the most dignified situations which the building affords, are two monuments of large dimensions, but not happily designed; the one in memory of Turenne, * the other of the less illustrious Vauban. To this noble edifice is

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* In 1793, when the Abbey of Saint Denis was defaced by the populace, and its tombs ransacked, destroyed, and pillaged, *par ordre du comité de salut public*, the corpse of this illustrious warrior, as well as that of Henry the Fourth, was found entire, and little injured by time. The remains of the darling monarch of the French shared the same fate as those of the other royal personages: they were profaned, mutilated, and thrown into a ditch, amid shouts of triumph and derision. The corpse of Turenne, with more refined impiety, was moved from place to place, and made a common show to gratify the vile curiosity of the populace. It was not until 1799 that the Directory ordered his remains to be deposited in the Museum of French Monuments: at length in 1800, by the commands of Buonaparte, they were trans-

injudiciously attached a diminutive building which they denominate the new church.

The outside of the central dome is gilded: this was not a new idea of Buonaparte's, as it had originally been thus ornamented. The good taste of this expensive embellishment has been called into question; yet even the critics do not deny that it forms, from whatever part of the city it is viewed, a splendid and elegant object.

The Church of *Sainte-Geneviève*,* or, as it still continues to be called, the *Pantheon*, is an extremely noble edifice: its dimensions are considerably larger than those of the Church of the Invalids; but the interior, although more pure in its architecture, is less pleasing in its general effect. There is one grand error in the building: the pillars, which immediately support the dome, are in appearance more massive and heavy than those on which they

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ported to the church of the Invalids; and placed in the original tomb which they occupied at Saint Denis.

* This church was commenced by Louis the Fifteenth in 1764.

rest: this destroys the symmetry of the whole. The exterior of the dome is grand and imposing: much more so than Saint Paul's, although the latter is nearly twice as large. Magnitude is indeed the only point in which our Cathedral is superior to the two buildings I have just mentioned.

Sainte-Geneviève still wears the appearance of a republican temple: there is a chilling want of all the usual attributes of religion: but this is no longer to be the case; workmen are at present employed in completing the interior, and in adapting it to the purposes for which it was originally constructed.

The inscription over the portico is unchanged;—

Aux Grands-Hommes La Patrie Reconnaissante.

and it is believed that the church will continue to receive the remains of the learned and the brave. The vaults designed for their reception extend under the whole of the building. These vaults consist chiefly of narrow rooms branching off from both sides of long pas-

sages; they are so constructed as to admit the light; and from the nature of the stone employed are free from damp: each room is arranged, to hold twelve bodies. Towards the central part of the buildings are vaults of more ample dimensions: these are designed for men of pre-eminent fame, and at present only contain the tombs of Voltaire and Rousseau.

This arrangement is I think ill judged in many respects. There is something disgusting and repugnant in the idea of mouldering bodies ranged against the sides of a room, and only separated from us by a thin stone. The earth is surely a more natural resting-place for the dead; or if vaults are used, those vaults should not be public. But here the same sarcophagus is the burying-place, and the monument: it is equally ill adapted to both purposes; too open and accessible for the former, too confined and secluded for the latter. The monument of an illustrious man is a religious and public tribute to his merit: all concealment is inconsistent with its purpose; con-

spicuous and prominent situations should be chosen for that which it is designed all the world should contemplate.

The same want of judgment and of proper feeling is shewn by the French in a somewhat analogous instance. The church-yards of Paris became unwholesome from the prodigious number of bodies which they contained: it was herefore resolved to clear them, and to remove the bones. The immense caverns, formed in procuring stone for building the capital, were deemed the most proper place in which to deposit them. Thus far the measure was expedient and sensible; but who except Frenchmen ever would have thought of arranging the bones in regular masses and fantastical shapes; and opening the *exhibition* to the public?

Millions of sculls in deformed rows resting on arm-bones; arm-bones resting on thigh-bones; all the remaining fragments, as not ornamental, thrown out of sight; altars built with bones arranged in various modes, and ornamented with sculls; tablets fringed with

the same materials, and inscribed with precepts, varying, according to their dates, from atheism to Christianity.—Such are the contents of the Catacombs, which we give our half franc to see. I had heard much of the horror, the solemnity, and religious awfulness of the scene; my only sensations were indignation and disgust.

The *Musée des Monumens Français*,* though not liable to the same censure, can hardly be viewed with feelings totally dissimilar.

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* This collection is placed in the suppressed convent and church of the *Petits Augustins.* The building is divided into different halls: that part which was formerly the body of the church, is filled with monuments and works of art of various periods, arranged promiscuously: in the other halls the order of time is attended to; and each contains the productions of a century. There are very few specimens anterior to the fourteenth century; but from that period the series is unbroken and ample.

In the gardens of the convent, amidst a miscellaneous assemblage of fragments of sculpture and architecture, are placed the tombs, *and the remains,* of Molière, La Fontaine, Boileau, Mabillon, Descartes, Montfaucon, Rohault, and of Abélard and Héloïse.

Monsieur Lenoir, by whose sole industry the Museum was formed, has certainly deserved well of his country. With unremitting perseverance, and at some personal risk, he succeeded in rescuing from destruction a very large number of valuable and interesting works of art: these he has arranged in chronological order, and they furnish an ample field of research to the antiquary; and to the artist a complete view of the progress of Sculpture in France, from its commencement to the present time.

But can this collection be contemplated without reflecting that it is the result of a nation's sacrilege and impiety; that the monuments thus brought together are the wrecks of a thousand religious edifices, plundered and destroyed; and that the very building in which they stand is an instance of this general ruin; that its inhabitants were driven from its dismantled walls to be massacred by an insane populace; or, a still harder destiny, to be thrown upon the world, infirm, aged, and poor.

The heterogeneous nature of the collection adds to the unpleasing effect. These tombs, torn from the dead bodies they protected, and converted from records of piety into mere objects of critical research, are blended with statues and bas-reliefs of heathen deities and heathen conquerors, and the still more repugnant exhibitions of revolutionary philosophy. * Next to the marble tomb of a moralist, is a plaster allegory complimentary to the genius of a fiddler; and windows, painted with the loves of Cupid and Psyche, glare upon the monuments of the monarchs, the warriors, and the statesmen of France.

These absurdities, to give them no harsher

* As instances of what is here spoken of, the following extracts are given from the catalogue of the Museum.

No. 483. *Bas-relief représentant Voltaire dans les Champs-Elysees, reçu par le Roi Henri IV.*

No. 486. *Bas-relief, en terre cuite, représentant Jean-Jacques Rousseau dans les Champs-Elysees, reçu par Socrate.*

name, are not considered as such by the French: variety, glitter, and contrast, are what they seek; and the better feelings, which would have separated religious things from trifling and profane, are either wanting, or not sufficiently powerful to contend with other motives.

LETTER XVI

ARCHITECTURE.—*Grand Scale of Public Institutions in Paris.—Halle au Blé.—Pont des Arts.—Pont de Neuilly.—Pont d'Iéna.—Malmaison.—Vincennes.—General State of Architecture in France.*

WHATEVER differences of opinion may exist as to the architectural magnificence of this capital, there are some points in which it is truly regal. I allude to the noble and immense scale of its public institutions, and may mention as instances the *Hôtel des Invalides*, the *Bibliothèque Royale*, the *Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers*, and the *Jardin des Plantes*.—The extensive munificence visible in these, and indeed in many other of the numerous public institutions, impresses the spectator with higher

ideas of the national grandeur and importance than all the ornamental splendor which surrounds them.

Every thing that with us is done by public bodies is in France the immediate act of the government: and hence many of their establishments assume an appearance of splendor and importance far beyond that which we are accustomed to see in England in similar situations, and where the real consequence and wealth are beyond all comparison greater.

The government controls all the principal branches of trade, and in her control she is liberal and magnificent. To this cause may be traced many of the finest structures in Paris: yet we have found that the Parisians are much less proud of the buildings which are designed for useful purposes, than of those which are purely ornamental; and it has been said, with more truth than good nature, that the French value themselves on their public edifices in the *inverse ratio* of their utility. The Halle au Blé is one of the most elegantly constructed build-

ings in Paris, yet a Parisian would smile at your preferring it to the silly column, *a la Victoire*, with its gilded finery in the Place du Châtelet.

The Halle au Blé, which serves the double purpose of a market and a magazine for corn, is a circular building of very large dimensions, and is covered with a dome nearly equal in size to that of Saint Paul's. Originally this was of wood, and from the nature of the windows, which extended from its centre to the bottom in alternate divisions, the market was oppressively hot. The roof having been destroyed by fire about twelve years ago, Buonaparte, who called this establishment *Le Musée du Peuple*, directed the present superb and elegant dome to be constructed.

It is a hemisphere entirely of metal, and all its parts, from the most important to the most minute, appear arranged with perfect science. Not an ounce of material is uselessly employed; and from hence results a union of strength and lightness which is at once astonishing and beau-

tiful. The vertical ribs which support the dome may be described as formed each by two bars of iron, the one advanced in front of the other, and both gradually decreasing in size as they ascend. In the largest part they are not above two inches and a half thick by three inches deep. At the bottom they are about a foot apart from each other, and at top they approach to within three inches. These two bars are connected at intervals of two feet and a half by light pieces of iron: The ribs are thus rendered inflexible; and from their greater lightness are perhaps stronger than if solid and of the same size. Horizontal circles of iron retain them in their position; and on these circles are placed sheets of copper, tinned on the inside to obstruct the transmission of heat. Light and air are admitted by a circular window at the top. We visited the Halle au Blé on one of those extremely hot days which occurred near the end of last month: on the outside, the copper was much too warm to be endured by the hand; but the inside of the build-

ing was perfectly temperate. I have been induced more minutely to describe this admirable specimen of scientific architecture from the circumstance of never having seen it mentioned in any of the accounts of Paris; and I believe that it is very rarely visited by strangers.

The modern bridges of Paris are constructed with admirable science, but have little claim to attention as far as relates to the beauty of their appearance. They are too much crowded together; and the narrowness of the river, the depth of its banks, and the scantiness of water, all contribute to lessen their effect. Most of them consist of five arches, and have the important advantage of being level throughout their whole extent. *Le Pont des Arts*, constructed solely for foot passengers, is of iron. The curves which form the arches are gracefully arranged; and as the piers are only the thickness of a pillar, the whole has a singularly light appearance. But the finest bridges across the Seine are two a little removed

from Paris, *Le Pont d'Iéna*, and *Le Pont de Neuilly*. The latter is splendid and of great length, being built at a place where the river is particularly wide, and the arches extending on both sides very far beyond the water. *Le Pont d'Iéna* is a still nobler structure. The arches are large, and boldly formed; and in the spaces above each pier are ornaments in basso relievo, representing an eagle placed within a wreath of laurel; their size is suited to their position, and they produce a very good effect: but here also the bridge is a great deal too *big* for the river. It is laughable to observe the unwillingness with which the French admit that the Thames is somewhat a finer river than the Seine; and the numberless *mais* with which they qualify the confession.

Malmaison and Vincennes, two of the buildings in the vicinity of Paris, are interesting from peculiar circumstances.

Malmaison, formerly the favourite residence of Buonaparte, we visited on our road from

Saint Germain-en-Laye to Paris. We found it occupied by an English general,* and the sentinels at the gates were men of the Life-Guards. They were the first English soldiers we had met with in France, and the sight of them, thus stationed, could not but delight us.

The plantation in front of the house has an ill effect, being rendered formal by straight walks which cross it in various directions. The building is small; and except a painted imitation of a tent which disfigures the entrance, is not unlike an English villa. There is a very large and handsome gallery ornamented with marble statues, some of which are by Canova, and the walls are covered with copies, chiefly by French artists, of the most celebrated pictures: the whole extent of the floor is inlaid with various kinds of rare wood. The bed-chamber of the late Empress Joséphine is a small oval room overwhelmed with velvet,

* Lord Combermere had his quarters at Malmaison.

porphyry, and gold. In none of the palaces in France is there a room decorated in a style of such lavish expense, and it forms a ridiculous contrast to the other apartments, which, excepting the gallery, are very far from sumptuous. The necessity of an accordance and union of parts to form a whole is little attended to by the French. Not in their buildings only, but in every thing, finery and dirt, poverty and extravagance, are permitted to approach each other in a manner such as would never be tolerated in England.

From the windows at the back of the house, there is a delightful view: the prospect over a rich and variegated country is bounded by hills covered with wood, and much resembles some of the beautiful scenery in Kent. Still more perfectly English are the gardens, which extend from the house to a considerable distance. They are not only exactly after our model, but yield in beauty to few which we possess. But that which gives the chief interest to Malmai-

son, is the reflections which it excites, and the sensation of walking over its rooms as conquerors.

The *Castle of Vincennes* merits attention from its antiquity and extent, and from its connexion with the history of our own country;* but I question whether we should have taken the trouble to visit it, had it not been to witness the silly show of defence which is still kept up there by the French.

In the capitulation by which the armies entered Paris, Vincennes was not included; and the Allies, their character of enemies having by degrees softened into that of friends, were subsequently unwilling to renew hostilities by attacking it.—The garrison, consisting of about a thousand men, and its governor, declared their determination to keep possession of the place. They hoisted the white flag, but refused to re-

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* The building, which is of very remote antiquity, was enlarged and strengthened by Henry the Second of England: and Henry the Fifth died within its walls.

ceive any orders, either from the Bourbon government, or from the Allies. Nothing can be more absurd than this resistance, as the place is totally defenceless, and half a dozen Prussian cannon would knock it to pieces in a few hours. The contempt of the conquerors has proved the castle's best protection: yet I suspect, that before long, the French will make this a loop-hole by which to creep out of their military degradation; and that we shall hear them boldly assert, that although Paris was occupied by the allied sovereigns, they were unable to subdue the strong places; and that Vincennes braved them to their teeth.

The road from Paris through the Barrière du Trône was guarded by Prussian patrols. These reached to within half a mile of the castle: there was then a space unoccupied, and the French sentinels commenced close under the walls of the building. They were the first regular soldiers of the French army which we had seen; and the uniform is so similar to that of the Prussians, that had it not been for the

contrast between good-humoured salutations and frowning looks, we might not have remarked the change. All the soldiers whom we saw were little men, and extremely out of condition as to their appointments, but looked somewhat fierce and very consequential. When we attempted to enter the gates they stopped us; and the universal passport—"*Nous sommes Anglais*" was rejected with "*Peste des Anglais!*" nor would they permit our walking completely round the castle: beyond this they shewed no inclination to annoy us. The three sides of the building which we could approach, although in some degree disfigured by temporary defences of brick, are stately and handsome, affording specimens of the architecture of various ages, mingled together in not inelegant confusion. There are several lofty quadrangular towers, but the *donjon* lifts its gloomy and unsightly mass far above them all. The Chapel is of Gothic architecture, and its exterior appearance is stately and elegant. These buildings stand upon a larger space of ground

than any similar edifices I am acquainted with in England, except Windsor, and deserve a more minute inspection than we were permitted to give them.

Before I close my letter, and quit the subject of French architecture, which has indeed detained me much longer than I at first intended, let me prevent your misconstruing my opinion as to the magnificence of Paris. I do not mean to assert that London is superior to this capital in its buildings. This undoubtedly is not the case: there are in Paris an infinitely greater number of splendid structures than with us. I would be understood to mean, that in the Banqueting-house at Whitehall, and in Westminster-abbey, we have more perfect and more noble buildings than any which the French possess: and, all comparison out of the question, although the lover of show and finery will meet with endless sources of gratification, every street having its palace, and every court its pillar, yet that there is in Paris little to delight or satisfy those who will not accept of splendor

and expense as an equivalent for the genuine beauties of the art.

I have claimed for England the superiority in the existing schools of painting and sculpture: in the architecture of the present day we are unquestionably behind the French.* Several of their recent buildings, some slight

* In the facility with which stone is procured, Paris has a great local advantage over London; as it is not possible for a building to be really magnificent which is constructed of any other material. In London the expense of stone is enormous, and it therefore behoves us never to employ it unless with ability and judgment. The costliness of an inelegant edifice renders it doubly ridiculous.

Of all the modern expedients to obtain *Show* at a cheap rate, that of cement in imitation of stone is the worst. A tradesman who hopes to make his fortune in a few years does wisely perhaps to attract customers by plastering the walls above his shop, but for public buildings to be thus dressed out is in the highest degree contemptible and ill judged. An unornamented brick building, with no pretence to architecture, except in the correctness of its proportions, is beyond all comparison more handsome than the most laboured stuccoed edifice, which let it be ever so well

allowance being made for the indigenous love of ornament, evince great ability and judgment: and I do not think that any of the Parisian architects would have disgraced their country by such structures as the ridiculous and disproportioned front of the College of Surgeons in Lincoln's-inn Fields, or the expensive and absurd hideousness of the new buildings at the Bank.—Still less do I think that any of them, had this capital possessed a building of such purity, correctness, and elegance as Whitehall, would have sacrificed their reputation by defacing it.

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executed, can not be like what it is intended to resemble. If this fashion continues to gain ground, London will gradually be converted into a mass of forgeries, of which the poverty and meanness will each day become more evident.

LETTER XVII.

THE STAGE.—*Description of the French Theatres.—Tragic Acting at the Théâtre Français.—Talma.*

To a stranger who visits Paris, the object next in interest to the Louvre is unquestionably the drama, as exhibited at the *Théâtre Français:* a zealous admirer of comedy would be repaid for all the fatigue of a journey to this capital were he to find no other source of gratification. The Parisians boast a long list of theatres; but this, which they by pre-eminence term the national theatre, is the only one appropriated to the legitimate drama, and the only one at which actors of eminence perform.

At some of the minor theatres we see farces,

and pleasantries of the day, acted with considerable comic effect; at others, an endless succession of lively and well-contrived melodramas, in which the vocal parts are not ill sustained. The general class of these performances approaches very nearly to the entertainments of a benefit-night at the Lyceum, Mr. Dowton and Miss Kelly being of course out of the question.

The Opera, *par excellence—the Opera*, as to fashion and company, holds much the same rank as our own. The music, the acting, and the singing, are bad; the machinery in all its departments admirable; and although the principal dancers do not excel those whom large salaries entice to England, the general effect of the dancing is much better, from the superiority of the *Corps de Ballet*. The Operas performed are about as rational as with us; yet, as in London, here and here only do the fashionable world resort.

In their interior construction, the French theatres are more massive and architectural

than the English.* They are much less ornamented, and less brilliantly lighted; the French intentionally avoiding splendor in the body of the house in order to add effect to the stage. The good taste of this must be admitted; but from it results an air of dulness and poverty, strikingly different from the appearance of a London playhouse. This sombre effect is lessened, but not entirely removed, by the rising of the curtain. On the stage every thing is splendid: the dresses, when the rigid attention which is paid to costume permits it, at least as rich as with us; the furniture much more mag-

* Instead of the light metal columns which support the boxes at Covent-garden and Drury-lane, a range of large pillars goes round the house; between these are the first and second circles of boxes.

At the Opera-house, the ceiling is sustained by eight pillars, placed in the form of an oblong octagon. These pillars are hollow, and contain seats which are furnished with small lattices adapted to the fluting of the column.

In the French theatres the only light in the body of the house is from a large chandelier suspended from the centre.

nificent, and more abundant; the scenery not so well painted, but in those performances in which change of place is admitted, it is far more adroitly managed. In one point of primary importance the Parisian theatres have the advantage over ours; they are of much smaller dimensions: in all of them, the necessity for the audience to hear and see appears to have been taken into consideration.

By the assistance of a *fiacre*, and guided by a *valet de place*, all of whom are profoundly skilled in the science of public amusements, a sufficient knowledge of the minor theatres may be obtained in two or three evenings; it is only the *Théâtre Français* which the lover of the drama will repeatedly visit.

A very few evenings fixed my opinion of the tragic and comic acting of the French. I am aware how liable we all are to the influence of national prejudice; but I have now attended so many of their performances as to feel myself in some degree justified in giving a decided opinion.—Their tragedy is bad in itself, and

to an English taste intolerable; their comedy is very little short of perfection.

My admiration of the tragedies of Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire, remains undiminished: I consider them as highly beautiful dramatic poems; and not merely calculated to please in the closet but to produce in the representation a powerful effect, even upon the admirers of Shakespeare. That they fail to do so is to be attributed solely to the manner in which they are performed.

To speak of the present style of tragic acting in France is to speak of Talma: his authority, and his example guide every thing. Talma may I think be described as a good actor, acting badly. Hic action and manner are graceful; his voice powerful, although occasionally indistinct. In passages of strong passion he is certainly great, and almost natural; but his action though elegant is too rapid, bustling, and Frenchified, to accord with tragic feeling. In pathetic passages he quits his natural voice, and whines most disagreeably. His declama-

tion is disfigured by tricks which to me appear unpardonable, but which certainly are not considered as defects by the French, since the other actors obviously copy them. Indeed the minute and servile imitation of Talma, in action, in manner, and in voice, which, with scarcely an exception, all the tragic performers seem anxious to render visible, rather than to conceal; although to us it produces a most ridiculous effect, proves how perfectly the original is suited to the taste of the audience. Of these tricks the worst is the running one sentence into another: this may sometimes produce a fine effect, but Talma appears to do it when it produces no other effect than totally to destroy the sense. This practice seldom occurs except where the sentence ends the line; and if the object be to hide the rhyme the advantage is much too dearly bought. Another very frequent impropriety is, that in order to preserve the flow of the verse, he slurs over words on which the spirit of the passage requires a strong emphasis. Propriety and

even elegance are sacrificed to effect: thus in despite of the sense, a dozen lines before a burst of passion, he sinks his voice, and hurries on with undue rapidity; or if the contrast which he wishes to produce requires it, he will utter as many lines with unmeaning slowness. The mode of singing out the words, though considered by the French as indispensable to tragic speaking, is in a high degree offensive and wearying to an English ear.

This tragedian's chief excellence is unquestionably in sudden bursts of passion, particularly of horror, indignation, or grief; but he has the common fault of actors, the too great fondness of doing that which he knows he does well: a passage of moderate energy he often swells into vehemence, which however well executed, must be ridiculous because unsuited to the occasion. He has the merit of being uniformly occupied and active in his part; there are no blanks in his acting; no pauses of inattention, either in the tamer parts of his own character, or in his by-play: his attention is

never for a moment directed to the audience; no glances round the house to recognise friends; to borrow a painter's term, he never looks out of the picture. Yet he may I think be accused of a total want of that talent, the highest of which an actor can boast, and which is possessed by Mr. Kemble in a pre-eminent degree;—the power of identifying himself with the character he personates: Talma, whether a Roman, a Mahometan, or a Christian, a warrior or a man of peace, is still the same in manner and in action; the distinction is in the dress, and in the speeches, not in the man.

His style of acting, French peculiarities out of the question, approaches nearer to that of Mr. Young than of any other performer on the English stage: he has less judgment, but evinces more genius and originality. In a word, had Talma been bred on the English stage he would have been a first-rate actor; but those who compare him to Kemble, or to Kean, prove themselves insensible to the transcendent the unrivalled excellences of the former, and

to the peculiar and powerful genius of the latter. One of his most admired characters, but in which I have not yet seen him, is Hamlet. A gentleman by whom I sat in the theatre the other evening told me, convulsing his fingers in illustration as he spoke, that in the scenes in which he imagines the ghost to appear—"*Il joue à faire frémir.*"*

Talma is a plain man of about the middle size; he is much too corpulent to be elegant

* Hamlet, Tragédie imitée de l'Anglais par Monsieur Jean-François Ducis, représentée pour la première fois en 1769.

This play is by no means the worst among the modern dramas of the French, but the plot and characters are very different from the original, and in very few passages is there even an attempt at translation.

Our bard's conception of the principal character appears never to have been suspected by his imitator. The Hamlet of Shakespeare is not mad; but cloakes in wildness of speech and manner the vengeance which he meditates; and the tumult and energy of his feelings tinge this assumed madness with reality. The Hamlet of Monsieur Ducis is actu-

in figure, or for his features to have their full expression: his eyes are very fine, and he perfectly understands the management of them.

The salary and other emoluments which

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tually mad, but talks rationally, and conducts himself with perfect decorum.

In Monsieur Ducis' emendations of the plot, Gertrude is represented as enamoured of Claudius before her marriage with the king. In the commencement of the second act, she narrates to her confidant, that the king, being ill,—

'dans ces momens, à mes soins seuls remis,
Empruntait le secours de ces puissants breuvages
Dont un art bienfaisant montra les avantages.'

By the advice of Claudius she prepares poison instead of physic, and carries it to the king; but on beholding him for the last time, is struck with remorse and rushes out of the chamber, leaving the cup behind her. She goes back to fetch it; and, to her surprise, finds that the king has taken his physic, as he supposed, and is dead. She is not without compunction

'Ce qui me plaît, Elvire, en mon trouble funeste,
C'est de sentir au moins combien je me déteste.'

Hamlet twice dreams that the ghost of his father appears to him, and tells the *foul unnatural murder.* Just at this time he receives letters from Norceste, the Horatio, Rosen-

he obtains from the theatre exceed three thousand pounds per annum; and he is said to be as absolute a monarch on the stage as his late friend and master was on the throne:

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crantz, and Guildenstern of the play, informing him that the King of England has perished by the dagger of an assassin. This confirms his belief in his dreams; and the impression is so strong as to derange his intellects: waking, as well as sleeping, he fancies that he beholds his father's form.

The play opens with Claudius instigating the nobles to elect him king; and at the same time he endeavours to obtain the hand of the queen. She is penitent; rejects his offer, and declares that her son shall be placed on the throne.

Norceste arrives, and is deputed by the queen to obtain from Hamlet an explanation of 'ses mortelles alarmes.' The prince tells him, and the speech is one of the best in the Play,

> 'Deux fois dans mon sommeil, ami, j'ai vu mon père,
> Non point le bras levé, respirant la colère;
> Mais désolé, mais pâle, et dévorant des pleurs
> Qu'arrachait de ses yeux l'excès de ses douleurs.
> J'ai voulu lui parler: plein de l'horreur profonde
> Qu'inspirait à mon cœur l'effroi d'un autre monde,
> Quel est son sort? lui dis-je; apprends-moi quel tableau
> S'offre à l'homme étonné dans ce monde nouveau.

authors as well as actors he treats as his vassals: this information however came to us from a prejudiced person, a dramatist whose plays the manager had refused.

Croirai-je de ces dieux que la main protectrice
Par d'éternels tourmens sur nous s'appesantisse?
" O mon fils," m'a-t-il dit, " ne m'interroge pas;
" Ces leçons du cercueil, ces secrets du trépas,
" Aux profanes mortels doivent être invisibles.
" Que du ciel sur les rois les arrêts sont terribles!
" Ah! s'il me permettait cet horrible entretien,
" La pâleur de mon front passerait sur le tien.
" Nos mains se sécheraient en touchant la couronne,
" Si nous savions, mon fils, à quel titre il la donne.
" Vivant, du rang suprême on sent mal le fardeau:
" Mais qu'un sceptre est pesant quand on entre au
" tombeau!"

NORCESTE.

Grands dieux!'

Hamlet, in obedience to the commands of the ghost, resolves to take the urn from his father's tomb.

' Osons tirer sa cendre
De la tombe où le crime, hélas! l'a fait descendre.
Je veux qu'à chaque instant cette cendre en ces lieux
De ces empoisonneurs fatigue au moins les yeux.'

Saint-Prix, whose acting partakes somewhat of the style of the old school, is I think the next best performer. He is an elderly man; extremely plain in his countenance, but his

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He then arranges with Norceste, that the latter shall give to Claudius and the queen an account of the murder of the English king, changing the circumstances to those which have happened in Denmark. This stratagem answers the purposes of the play introduced in the original; and the dialogue is thus managed.

HAMLET.

Vous avez vu Norceste?

CLAUDIUS.

Il a d'abord porté
Ses premiers pas vers nous.

HAMLET.

Il vous eût raconté
La triste mort du roi que pleure l'Angleterre.

CLAUDIUS.

Oui, le bruit s'en répand: ce n'est plus un mystère.

HAMLET.

Dit-on par quelle main?—

figure one of the finest I have ever seen. All the other actors are dull copiers of Talma, having all his faults and none of his genius. Not one of the tragic actresses deserves notice.

The rhyme offended me much less than I

NORCESTE.

Vous savez quels discours
Souvent la mort des rois fait naître dans les cours.
Parmi tous ces faux bruits, mal-aisés à comprendre,
Qu'au trépas de ce roi l'on se plut à répandre,
On dit que le poison—mais je ne le crois pas.

CLAUDIUS.

Eh! comment supposer de pareils attentats?

HAMLET.

Mais qui soupçonne-t-on de cet énorme crime?

NORCESTE.

Un mortel honoré de la publique estime.

HAMLET.

Enfin qui nomme-t-on?

NORCESTE.

Un prince de son sang,
Qu'après lui la naissance appelait à son rang.

expected; indeed they use every endeavour to hide it: this we did also I believe in our

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GERTRUDE.

Vous a-t-on informé qu'il eût quelque complice?

NORCESTE.

Oui—

HAMLET.

La reine peut-être?

GERTRUDE.

O ciel!—par quel indice
A-t-on pu découvrir?——

NORCESTE.

Je l'ignore.

GERTRUDE.

En secret
Quel motif donne-t-on d'un aussi grand forfait?

NORCESTE.

L'amour du diadême, une flamme adultère

bas à Hamlet.

Il n'est point troublé.

HAMLET, *bas à Norgeste.*

Non: mais regarde ma mère.

lamentable days of heroic tragedy. To the rhythm of the verse they pay the most scrupulous attention; every thing is sacrificed to it, and a failure in this point is considered as un-

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Ophelie, the daughter of Claudius, informs the queen that Hamlet's hopeless love for herself is the cause of his madness, the decree of the late king having forbidden her nuptials with the prince. The queen is delighted at receiving this intelligence, and declares that they shall be married instantly.

Hamlet's soliloquy, which is by far the best passage in the play, commences the fourth act.

'Eh! qu'offre donc la mort à mon ame abattue?
Un asile assuré, le plus doux des chemins
Qui conduit au repos les malheureux humains.
Mourons. Que craindre encor quand on a cessé d'être?
La mort—c'est le sommeil—c'est un reveil peut-être.
Peut-être—Ah! c'est ce mot qui glace, épouvanté,
L'homme au bord du cercueil par le doute arrêté.
Devant ce vaste abyme il se jette en arrière,
Ressaisit l'existence, et s'attache à la terre.
Dans nos troubles pressans qui peut nous avertir
Des secrets de ce monde où tout va s'engloutir?
Sans l'effroi qu'il inspire, et la terreur sacrée
Qui défend son passage et siége à son entrée,

pardonable. We were present when a provincial actor made his *debut;* the chief censure which he met with was on this ground;—"*Quelle oreille!*" We were ignorant enough to think

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Combien de malheureux iraient dans le tombeau
De leurs longues douleurs déposer le fardeau!
Ah! que ce port souvent est vu d'un œil d'envie
Par le faible agité sur les flots de la vie!
Mais il craint dans ses maux, au-delà du trépas,
Des maux plus grands encore, et qu'il ne connaît pas.'

Ophélie offers her love to Hamlet. It is refused, but not rudely. The queen enters and seconds her endeavours; but in vain. A delirium seizes Hamlet, and he fancies that he beholds his father's ghost.

HAMLET, *à Gertrude.*

'Le trouble où je me plonge
De mes sens prevenus vous paraît un mensonge.

GERTRUDE.

En pourrais-tu douter! ne vois-tu point, hélas!
Que c'est ta seule erreur—

HAMLET.

Ne vous y trompez pas,
Tout est réel, madame!'

that the *débutant* might not be quite wrong in attending to the sense rather than the sound. The monotonous cadence of the verse, though at first unpleasant to the ear, soon ceases to be

Cladius's plot with Polonius and the nobles goes on; and Norceste contrives a counterplot in favour of the prince. The fifth act opens by Norceste presenting the urn to Hamlet.

'La voilà donc, Seigneur, cette urne redoutable.
Qui contient d'un héros la cendre déplorable.'

Ophelie enters; and Hamlet informs her of the guilt of Claudius. She pleads for her father; and the whole of the scene is much more closely borrowed from Otway's Venice Preserved than from Shakespeare. Next enters the queen; and we have the picture scene, the urn supplying the place of the portraits.

" HAMLET, *lui présentant l'urne.*

'Prenez cette urne, et jurez-moi sur elle·
" Non, ta mère, mon fils, ne fut point criminelle."
L'osez-vous? je vous crois.

GERTRUDE.

Donne.

HAMLET.

Vous hésitez.

perceived; and the long speeches go off much less heavily on the stage than in reading. The actors are obviously afraid of them, and hurry

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GERTRUDE.

Ah! pardonne à mes sens encor trop agités—

HAMLET.

Attestez maintenant—

Il lui met l'urne entre les mains.

GERTRUDE.

Eh bien!—oui—moi—j'atteste—

Je ne puis plus souffrir un objet si funeste.'

She faints, and Hamlet moved by her grief forgives her;—

'Chère ombre, enfin tes vœux n'ont plus rien à prétendre;
L'excès de ses douleurs doit apaiser ta cendre.'

Claudius and his party attack the palace gates. Hamlet again sees his father's shade, and he once again resolves to obey its command and take the life of his mother; but he is unable to execute his purpose, and flies from her presence. At the gates he meets and kills Claudius.—The queen stabs herself; and without the slightest notice of poor Ophélie, the play ends by Hamlet's declaring;—

'Mais je suis homme et roi: réservé pour souffrir,
Je saurai vivre encor; je fais plus que mourir.'

on at a great rate, frequently in open defiance of the sense.

We heard from several quarters that Talma, the *Lycurgus* of the French stage, had introduced great alteration in the style of acting, all borrowed from the English. The information was requisite, as certainly we never should have suspected the honour done to our country. These alterations were explained to us, as consisting in the substitution of nature, ease, and propriety, for the formality and stateliness of their former manner. With how little success this has been attempted the preceding remarks will in some measure enable you to judge; and it may perhaps be doubted whether it be possible for their stage to be much benefited by any imitation of ours. The French and English dramas differ too essentially for the style of acting which suits the one to be applicable to the other. For my own part, I am convinced that in spite of all the improprieties in what they term the old school of acting, the performance of Racine's tragedies would have

more delighted me, had I seen them before this anglicized manner had been attempted: among the French themselves the elder critics appear to regret the innovation.

The *Théâtre Français* is generally filled; when Talma performs it is crowded. He is well received by the whole of the audience; but his most zealous admirers are in the *Parterre:* this may be accounted for by his known attachment to Buonaparte.* The play begins at seven o'clock, and ends a little after nine: the second piece lasts about an hour: there is hardly any interval between the acts, the over-

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* Talma was highly favoured by Buonaparte, to whom he frequently read dramatic and other poetry; and if the caricaturists of Paris may be credited, the First Consul condescended to receive instructions from him in elocution, and the management of his imperial robes.

Talma is reported to have said,—"*Buonaparte me boude quelquefois de ce que je joue mieux que lui le rôle de tyran.*" This actor visited the ex-emperor at Elba; and was unquestionably an important agent in the bold conspiracy which replaced him for a few weeks on the throne.

doubly offensive; and the character of Philoc-tète is by no means favourable to Talma's peculiar powers. The pause which separated the two pieces was occupied in foreboding a second disappointment.

In a few minutes the curtain rose, and I shall long remember the surprise and pleasure which took place of our fears. It might almost have been imagined that an enchanter's wand had been employed during the interval. Every fault seemed transformed, as if by magic, into its contrary excellence: it was difficult to believe that we were in the same theatre, listening to the same language, and beholding actors of the same nation.—Graceful and polite in their action and manner; natural in their mode of speaking, the words not being sung out, or any attempt made either to disguise the rhyme or improve the verse; lively, animated, and elegant, perfectly at home, and at their ease, each character was so accurately conceived, and executed with such facility and truth, as to lose all appearance of acting: the personages of

the drama themselves, Arnolphe, Agnès, Horace, Georgette, stood before us.

There can be no doubt that comic acting is an effort of less difficulty to the French than to the English; they have therefore less merit in succeeding: but most important is the advantage which results to their stage from this facility. With us, the one or two chief characters are well performed, the remainder vilely; on the French stage we never see a bad comedian. Their degrees of merit vary of course from very high, to very moderate; but all of them have certain natural, or rather national, capabilites for comic acting, which render it impossible for them to offend, or injure the general effect of the play, as the inferior performers do with us. The French hardly seem acting when they perform in comedy,—*Natio comœda est*:—the charm which this produces cannot be understood by those who have not felt it. We have I think one actor, and only one, who has this perfect appearance of not being on the stage: but Mr. Dowton deserves

more credit than the French; with him it is the result of exquisite skill, exquisitely concealed; with the French I really believe that it comes without their seeking it.

The tragic actors at the *Théâtre Français* appear to be few in number; but they have a long list of excellent comedians. Fleury, the chief favourite, is a most admirable actor: he is about fifty years of age, of low stature, but with a countenance of extreme intelligence: his *fort* is in portraying finesse and subtlety; in *Tartuffe* he cannot be surpassed. Baptiste *aîné* may perhaps be ranked as next in merit: he is an old man, peculiarly gentlemanlike in his person and manner; and the comic expression of his features is more powerful than in any countenance I ever beheld, and yet without the slightest admixture of farce or buffoonery. His most famous character is Lord Ogleby, in a play translated from our Clandestine Marriage: never was a man more suited by nature for any part. There are two or three actors who perform *Les Amants* with a degree

of spirit, feeling, and elegance, quite unknown on the English stage.

Mademoiselle Mars is an inimitable, a perfect actress: she is extremely handsome, and joins to the most unconstrained vivacity, an appearance of easy dignity and good-breeding which is singularly attractive. I have hardly ever seen upon the stage any thing more masterly than the manner in which she acted the part of Celiante in *Le Philosophe Marié*, a bad play by Destouches. The character is ill drawn, coarse, and stupid; its faults were redeemed and hid by the skill of the actress in a degree hardly to be conceived.—Mademoiselle Leverd is equal in talent to Mrs. Jordan, with the great additional merit of never being induced, by the love of applause, to lay aside even for a moment her gentility of manner.

The strong difference between French and English character causes necessarily an essential difference between the comedy of the two countries; the main object of each, as indeed of all comedy, being the portraying of national

character and manner: this difference is decidedly in favour of the French; their vivacity and lightness are better adapted to the purposes of genteel comedy, the only species admitted on their stage, than the gravity and formal manner of the English.

A further dissimilarity may, I think, be remarked. In English comedies of this class, sorrows and misfortunes converted into joy are the ground-work of the plot; in the French, the personages are thrown into perplexities, and the dexterously surmounting these, their unexpected renewal, and the artfully overcoming them a second time, constitute the chief business of the play: hence, although English comedy is the more interesting, the French is the more amusing.

In giving the preference to the comic drama of the French, it is almost needless to observe, that I speak solely with reference to English plays of a similar class. The works of the French dramatists admit of no comparison either in powerful delineation of human na-

ture, or in poetical merit, with the genuine English comedies of Shakespeare and his followers.

In all the legitimate dramas of the French, the unities are strictly attended to: the necessity for so doing is insisted upon in express terms by Boileau.

> Mais nous, que la Raison à ses regles engage,
> Nous voulons qu'avec art l'action se ménage :
> Qu'en un Lieu, qu'en un Jour, un seul Fait accompli
> Tienne jusqu'à la fin le théâtre rempli.
>
> *L'Art Poetique.*

An English taste is naturally predisposed to deem this submission to rule inconsistent with genius, and destructive of scenic effect. Yet singleness of action, and some approach to correctness in the time of its duration, may I think be obtained by a skilful writer with little detriment to the interest or animation of his play; or at least the advantages obtained are commensurate with the sacrifice. But in rigidly attending to the unity of place, little

if any thing is gained, and most important advantages are given up: the author is fettered in the management of his plot; a thousand modes of improving it, and rendering the story natural and interesting, are withheld from him; and he is obliged to have recourse to awkward and lame contrivances, and to a perpetual recurrence of the same forced expedients and worn-out tricks. The change of place, it is urged, destroys the illusion which it is the chief business of the drama to produce. The theory of dramatic delusion may perhaps be doubted altogether; but admitting that such delusion can be produced, surely the absurdities and the improbabilities, which are the inevitable consequence of an obedience to the rule, must more fatally disturb it than the most arbitrary change of place.

The ill effects which arise from the inventive powers being thus shackled may be traced in all the dramatic writings of the French: there results from it a want of interest, a poverty, and a sameness, in the plot of their comedies which

although concealed in a great measure by the vivacity of character, is still an important defect.

The skill which Moliere has shewn in surmounting this difficulty, is admirable. To many of his plays it has been objected, and justly, that the plots are improbable, and carelessly managed; but the merit of which I speak relates, not to the general groundwork or development of the plot, but to the artful manner in which he preserves the unity of place, and yet makes the entrances and exits of the characters appear natural and unconstrained.

Of Moliere's merits as a comic writer it is difficult to speak in terms of adequate praise. The whole circle of French literature affords nothing more delightful than the perusal of his works; yet let no one consider himself as enabled to appreciate their full worth, before he has seen them on the stage. I had always placed this author in the very first rank of French writers; but certainly, until I had been present at the representation of his plays, I

had no idea of his pre-eminent excellence.—His profound knowledge of human nature, his nice distinction of the lighter shades of variation in character, his good sense, the correctness of his ideas, and the forcible and clear manner in which he expresses them, his wit, his vivacity, and the elegance and purity of his style, class him amongst the finest dramatic writers of any age.

No severer trammels were ever imposed on genius than those arising from the structure of French verse.—The alternation of their masculine and feminine rhymes, the hemistic, and I know not how many other arbitrary laws, appear incompatible with propriety and ease of diction; especially when we remember how ill adapted the French tongue is, from its nature, to the purposes of poetry. Spite of these restraints Moliere, less I think by skill than by a talent peculiar to himself, is perfectly unconstrained and natural in his language; his characters speak with all the facility and freedom of real conversation; the words are

exactly those which we should expect such personages to use; the verse and the rhyme appear unsought for and accidental;* without any of the transpositions, any of the useless, closing epithets, which disfigure and weaken the poetry of the French.

To an English taste the rhyme is one objection to the tragedy of the French; it is not so with the comedies of Moliere: on the contrary, at the representation of *L'Avare*, and some of his other prose dramas, we felt the

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* "Rare et fameux Esprit, dont la fertile veine
Ignore en écrivant le travail et la peine;
Pour qui tient Apollon tous ses trésors ouverts,
Et qui sais à quel coin se marquent les bons vers;
Dans les combats d'esprit savant maître d'escrime,
Enseigne-moi, MOLIERE, où tu trouves la rime.
On diroit, quand tu veux, qu'elle te vient chercher.
Jamais au bout du vers on ne te voit broncher;
Et, sans qu'un long détour t'arrête, ou t'embarrasse,
A-peine as-tu parlé, qu'elle-même s'y place."

Boileau, Satire II.

want of the verse; the speeches appeared less animated, and produced a less pleasing effect.

I am not surprised that the French should admire their own style of tragic acting; but it is matter of surprise to me, that the same persons who do admire it should be pleased with the mode of acting in comedy; for no two things can be more perfectly different, or conducted on more opposite principles. It was an axiom with Garrick, that no one could be a perfect tragedian who was not a good comic actor:—this rule cannot be applicable to the Parisian stage; and indeed Talma disproves it, as when he changes the buskin for the sock his failure is most lamentable.

The French tragedy disdains ever to descend into comedy; but occasionally, though less frequently than with us, there are in their comedies serious and pathetic passages: the tragedy tone and manner never appear in these; they are spoken with pathos, propriety, and

perfect nature: how so spoken they can please the taste of the audience is to me a paradox.

But to conclude this long disquisition.—Be it prejudice or want of taste I know not, but I am firmly convinced that the French face, French manner, the French language, and French verse, are inconsistent with the perfection of tragic gravity and passion: they are exactly and eminently suited to comedy; and a play of Moliere's, acted at the *Théâtre Français*, is an intellectual treat of the highest order.

This is the last letter which I shall have the pleasure of addressing to you from Paris, as our departure is fixed for to-morrow.—Delighted with having so well-timed our visit, and highly gratified with much that we have seen, even independently of the Louvre, we shall return to England, as I think all Eng-

lishmen must do, more proud of our country than when we left it, and more firmly attached to its customs and 'its manners.

THE END.

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